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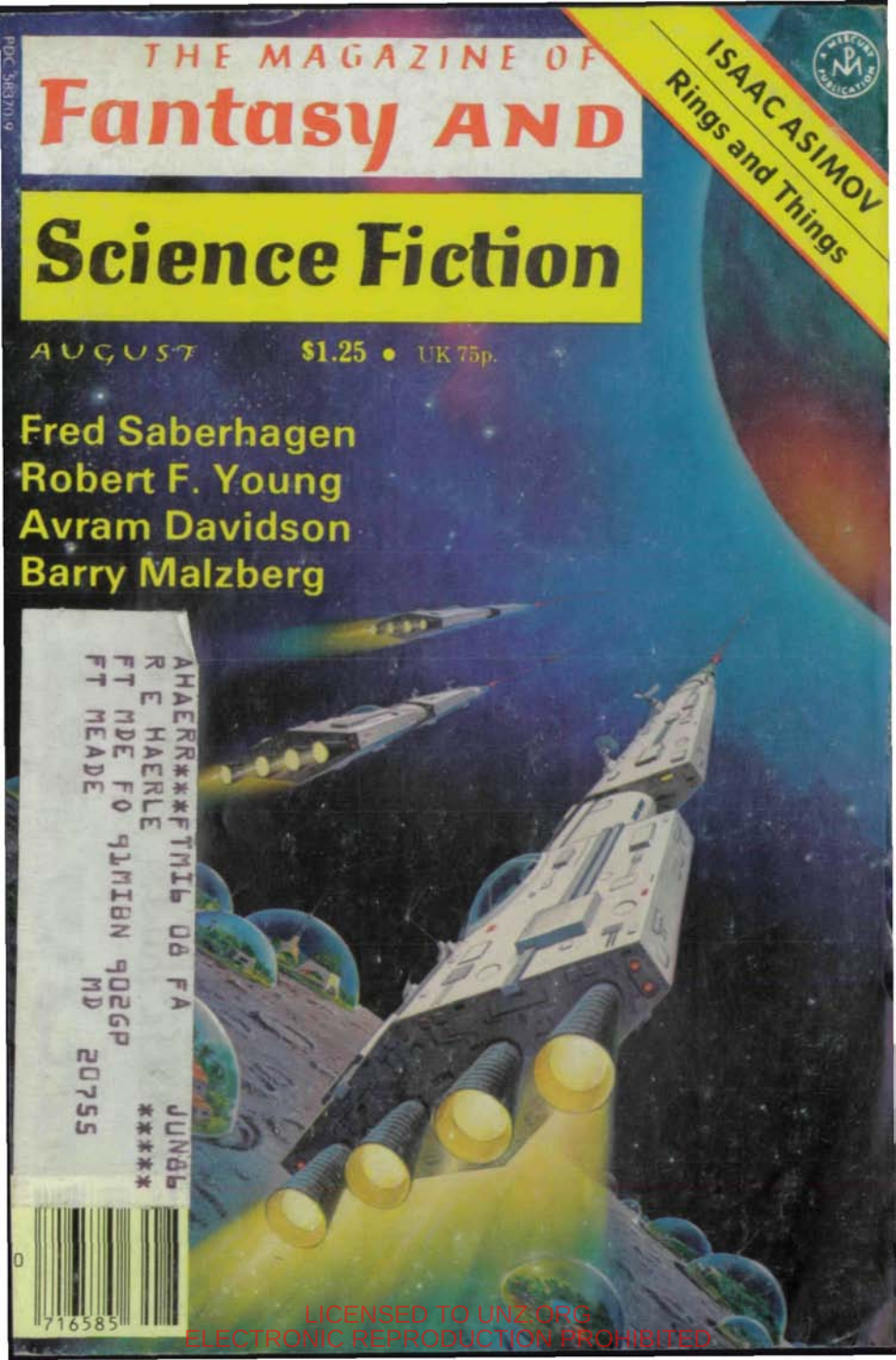

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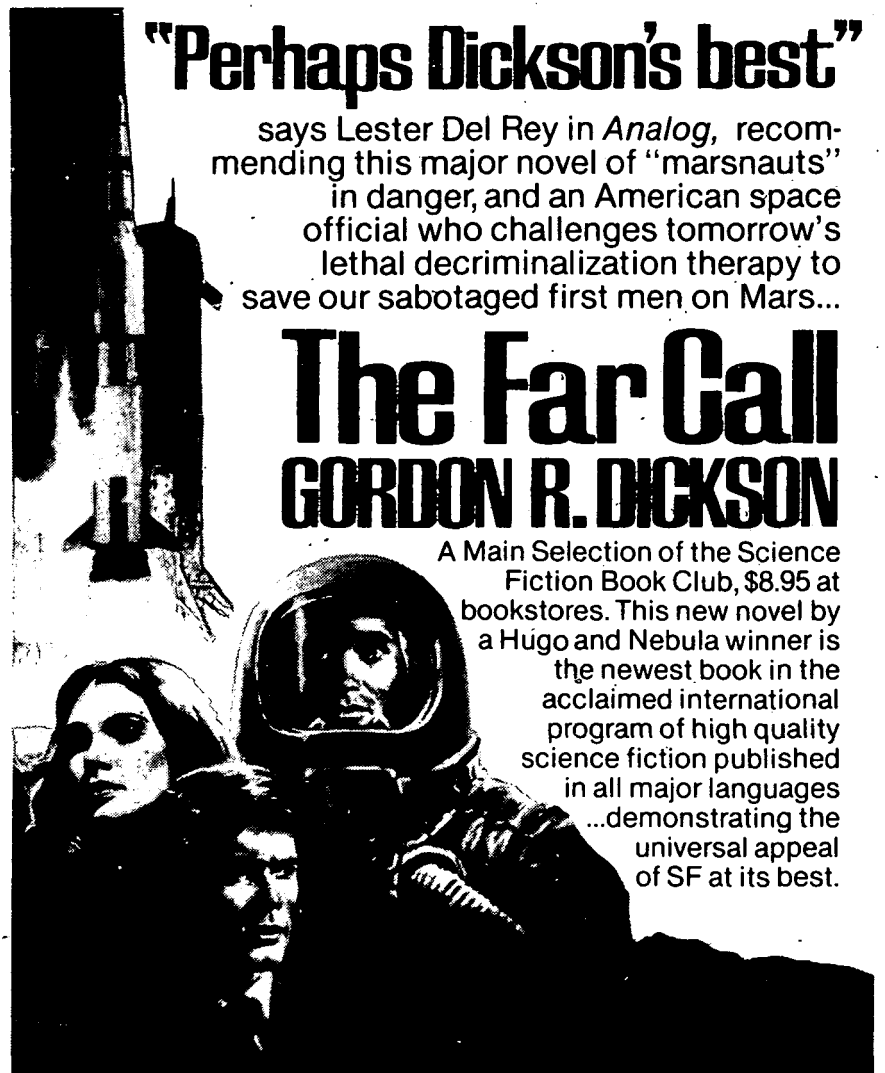

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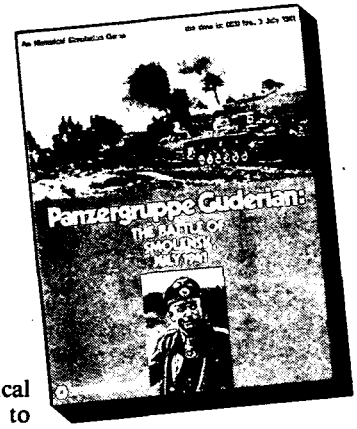

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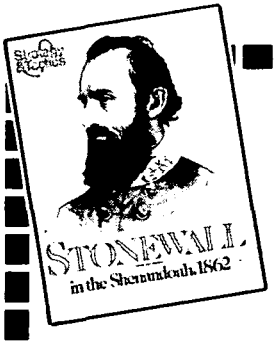

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Here is some suspenseful sf about a berserker force which descends on a planet named Waterfall. The berserkers were unliving and unmanned war machines programmed to destroy anything that lived. And life on Waterfall consisted of some odd marine life and four defenseless humans . . .

Smasher

by FRED SABERHAGEN

Claus Slovensko was coming to the conclusion that the battle in nearby space was going to be invisible to anyone on the planet Waterfall — assuming that there was really going to be a battle at all.

Claus stood alone atop a forty-meter dune, studying a night sky that flamed with the stars of the alien Busog cluster, mostly blue-white giants which were ordinarily a sight worth watching in themselves. Against that background, the greatest energies released by interstellar warships could, he supposed, be missed as a barely visible twinkling. Unless, of course, the fighting should come very close indeed.

In the direction he was facing, an ocean made invisible by night stretched from near the foot of the barren dune to a horizon marked only by the cessation of the stars. Claus turned now to scan once more the sky in the other direction. That way, toward planetary north, the starry profusion went on and on. In the northeast a silvery half-moon, some antique stage designer's concept of what Earth's own moon should be, hung low behind thin clouds. Below those clouds extended an entire continent of lifeless sand and rock. The land masses of Waterfall were bound in a silence that Earth ears found uncanny, stillness marred only by the wind, by murmurings of sterile streams, and by occasional deep rumblings in the rock itself.

Claus continued turning slowly, till he faced south again. Below him the night sea lapped with lulling false familiarity. He sniffed the air, and shrugged, and gave up squinting at the stars, and began to feel his way, one cautious foot after another, down the shifting slope of the dune's flank. A small complex of buildings, labs and living quarters bunched as if for companion-

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ship, the only human habitation on the world of Waterfall, lay a hundred meters before him and below. Tonight as usual the windows were all cheerfully alight. Ino Vacroux had decided, and none of the other three people on the planet had seen any reason to dispute him, that any attempt at blackout would be pointless. If a berserker force was going to descend on Waterfall, the chance of four defenseless humans avoiding discovery by the unliving killers would be nil.

Just beyond the foot of the dune, Claus passed through a gate in the high fence of fused rock designed to keep out drifting sand — with no land vegetation of any kind to hold the dunes in place, they tended sometimes to get pushy.

A few steps past the fence, he opened the lockless door of the main entrance to the comfortable living quarters. The large common room just inside was cluttered with casual furniture, books, amateur art, and small and middle-sized aquariums. The three other people who completed the population of the planet were all in this room at the moment, and all looked up to see if Claus brought news.

Jenny Surya, his wife, was seated at the small computer terminal in the far corner, wearing shorts and sweater, dark hair tied up somewhat carelessly, long elegant legs crossed. She was frowning as she looked up, but abstractedly, as if the worst news Claus might be bringing them would be of some potential distraction from their work.

Closer to Claus, in a big chair pulled up to the big communicator cabinet, slouched Ino Vacroux, senior scientist of the base. Claus surmised that Ino had been a magnificent physical specimen a few decades ago, before being nearly killed in a berserker attack upon another planet. The medics had restored function but not fineness to his body. The gnarled, hairy thighs below his shorts were not much thicker than a child's; his ravaged torso was draped now in a flamboyant shirt. In a chair near him sat Glenna Reyes, his wife, in her usual work garb of clean white coveralls. She was just a little younger than Vacroux, but wore the years with considerably more ease.

"Nothing to see," Claus informed them all, with a loose wave meant to describe the lack of visible action in the sky.

"Or to hear, either," Vacroux grated. His face was grim as he nodded toward the communicator. The screens of the device sparkled, and its speakers hissed a little, with noise that wandered in from the stars and stranger things than stars nature had set in this corner of the Galaxy.

Only a few hours earlier, in the

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middle of Waterfall's short autumn afternoon, there had been plenty to hear indeed. Driven by a priority code coming in advance of a vitally important message, the communicator had boomed itself to life, then roared the message through the house and across the entire base, in a voice that the four people heard plainly even four hundred meters distant where they were gathered to watch dolphins.

"Sea Mother, this is Brass Trumpet. Predators here, and we're going to try to turn them. Hold your place. Repeating...."

One repetition of the substance came through, as the four were already hurrying back to the house. As soon as they got in they had played back the automatically recorded signal; and then when Glenna had at last located the code book somewhere, and they could verify the worst, they had played it back once more.

Sea Mother was the code name for any humans who might happen to be on Waterfall. It had been assigned by the military years ago, as part of their precautionary routine, and had probably never been used before today. Brass Trumpet, according to the book, was a name conveying a warning of deadly peril — it was to be used only by a human battle force when there were thought to be berserkers already in the Waterfall system or on their way to it. And "predators here" could hardly mean anything but berserkers — unliving and unmanned war machines, programmed to destroy whatever life they found. The first of them had been built in ages past, during the madness of some interstellar war between races now long-since vanished. Between berserkers and starfaring Earthumans, war had now been chronic for a thousand standard years.

That Brass Trumpet's warning should be so brief and vague was understandable. The enemy would doubtless pick it up as soon as its intended hearers, and might well be able to decode it. But for all the message content revealed, Sea Mother might be another powerful human force, toward which Brass Trumpet sought to turn them. Or it would have been conceivable for such a message to be sent to no one, a planned deception to make the enemy waste computer capacity and detection instruments. And even if the berserkers' deadly electronic brains should somehow compute correctly that Sea Mother was a small and helpless target, it was still possible to hope that the berserkers would be too intent on fatter targets elsewhere, too hard-pressed by human forces, or both, to turn aside and snap up such a minor morsel.

During the hours since that first

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warning, there had come nothing but noise from the communicator. Glenna sighed, and reached out to pat her man on the arm below the sleeve of his loud shirt. "Busy day with the crustaceans tomorrow," she reminded him.

"So we'd better get some rest. I know." Ino looked and sounded worn. He was the only one of the four who had ever seen berserkers before, at anything like close range; and it was not exactly reassuring to see how grimly and intensely he reacted to the warning of their possible approach.

"You can connect the small alarm," Glenna went on, "so it'll be sure to wake us if another priority message comes in."

That, thought Claus, would be easier on the nerves than being blasted out of sleep by that God-voice shouting again, this time only a few meters from the head of their bed.

"Yes, I'll do that." Ino thought, then slapped his chair-arms. He made his voice a little brighter. "You're right about tomorrow. And over in Twenty-three we're going to have to start feeding the mantis shrimp." He glanced round at the wall near his chair, where a long chart showed ponds, bays, lagoons and tidal pools, all strung out in a kilometers-long array, most of it natural, along this part of the coast. This array was a chief reason why the Sea Mother base had been located where it was.

From its sun and moon to its gravity and atmosphere, Waterfall was remarkably Earthlike in almost every measureable attribute save one — this world was congenitally lifeless. About forty standard years past, during a lull in the seemingly interminable berserker-war, it had appeared that the peaceful advancement of interstellar humanization might get in an inning or two, and work had begun toward altering this lifelessness. Great ships had settled upon Waterfall with massive inoculations of Earthly life, in a program very carefully orchestrated to produce eventually a twin-Earth circling one of the few Sol-type suns in this part of the Galaxy.

The enormously complex task had been interrupted when war flared again. The first recrudescence of fighting was far away, but it drew off people and resources. A man-wife team of scientists were selected to stay alone on Waterfall for the duration of the emergency. They were to keep the program going along planned lines, even though at a slow pace. Ino and Glenna had been here for two years now. A supply ship from Atlantis called at intervals of a few standard months; and the last to call, eight local days ago, had brought along another husband-and-wife team for

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a visit. Claus and Jenny were both psychologists, interested in the study of couples living in isolation; and they were to stay at least until the next supply ship came.

So far the young guests had been welcome. Glenna, her own children long grown and independent on other worlds, approached motherliness sometimes in her attitude. Ino, more of a born competitor, swam races with Claus and gambled — lightly — with him. With Jenny he alternated between half-serious gallantry and teasing.

"I almost forgot," he said now, getting up from his chair before the communicator, and racking his arms and shoulders with an intense stretch. "I've got a little present for you, Jen."

"Oh?" She was bright, interested, imperturbable. It was her usual working attitude, which he persisted in trying to break through.

Ino went out briefly, and came back to join the others in the kitchen. A small snack before retiring had become a daily ritual for the group.

"For you," he said, presenting Jen with a small bag of clear plastic. There was water inside, and something else.

"Oh, my goodness." It was still her usual nurse-like business tone, which evidently struck Ino as a challenge. "What do I do with it?"

"Keep him in that last aquarium in the parlor," Ino advised. "It's untenanted right now."

Claus, looking at the bag from halfway across the kitchen, made out in it one of those non-human, non-mammalian shapes that are apt to give Earth people the impression of the intensely alien, even when the organism sighted comes from their own planet. It was no bigger than an adult human finger, but replete with waving appendages. There came to mind something written by Lafcadio Hearn about a centipede: *The blur of its moving legs ... toward which one would no more advance one's hand ... than toward the spinning blade of a power saw ...*

Or some words close to those. Jen, Claus knew, cared for the shapes of non-mammalian life even less than he did. But she would grit her teeth and struggle not to let the teasing old man see it.

"Just slit the bag and let it drain into the tank," Ino was advising, for once sounding pretty serious. "They don't like handling ... okay? He's a bit groggy right now, but tomorrow, if he's not satisfied with you as his new owner, he may try to get away."

Glenna, in the background, was rolling her eyes in the general direction of Brass Trumpet, miming: What is the old fool up to now? When is he going to grow up?

"Get away?" Jen inquired

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sweetly. "You told me the other day that even a snail couldn't climb that glass —"

The house was filled with the insistent droning of the alarm that Ino had just connected. He's running some kind of test, Claus thought at once. Then he saw the other man's face and knew that Ino wasn't.

Already the new priority message was coming in: *"Sea Mother, the fight's over here. Predators departing Waterfall System. Repeating ..."*

Claus started to obey an impulse to run out and look at the sky again, then realized that there would certainly be nothing to be seen of the battle now. Radio waves, no faster than light, had just announced that it was over. Instead he joined the others in voicing their mutual relief. They had a minute or so of totally unself-conscious cheering.

Ino, his face much relieved, broke out a bottle of something and four glasses. In a little while, all of them drifted noisily outside, unable to keep from looking up, though knowing they would find nothing but the stars to see.

"What," asked Claus, "were berserkers doing here in the first place? We're hardly a big enough target to be interesting to a fleet of them. Are we?"

"Not when they have bigger game in sight." Ino gestured upward with his drink. "Oh, any living target interests them, once they get it in their sights. But I'd guess that if a sizable force was here they were on the way to attack Atlantis. See, sometimes in space you can use a planet or a whole system as a kind of cover. Sneak up behind its solar wind, as it were, its gravitational vortex, as someone fighting a land war might take advantage of a mountain or a hill." Atlantis was a long-colonized system less than a dozen parsecs distant, heavily populated and heavily defended. The three habitable Atlantean planets were surfaced mostly with water, and the populace lived almost as much below the waves as on the shaky continents.

It was hours later when Glenna roused and stirred in darkness, pulling away for a moment from Ino's familiar angularity nested beside her.

She blinked. "What was that?" she asked her husband, in a low voice barely cleared of sleep.

Ino scarcely moved. "What was what?"

"A flash, I thought. Some kind of bright flash, outside. Maybe in the distance."

There came no sound of thunder, or of rain. And no more flashes, either, in the short time Glenna remained awake.

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Shortly after sunrise next morning, Claus and Jen went out for an early swim. Their beach, pointed out by their hosts as the place where swimmers would be safest and least likely to damage the new ecology, lay a few hundred meters along the shoreline to the west, with several tall dunes between it and the building complex.

As they rounded the first of these dunes, following the pebbly shoreline, Claus stopped. "Look at that." A continuous track, suggesting the passage of some small, belly-dragging creature, had been drawn in the sand. Its lower extremity lay somewhere under water, its upper was concealed amid the humps of sterile sand somewhere inland.

"Something," said Jenny, "crawled up out of the water. I haven't seen that before on Waterfall."

"Or came down into it." Claus squatted beside the tiny trail. He was anything but a skilled tracker, and could see no way of determining which way it led. "I haven't seen anything like this before either. Glenna said certain species — I forget which — were starting to try the land. I expect this will interest them when we get back."

When Claus and Jenny had rounded the next dune, there came into view on its flank two more sets of tracks, looking very much like the first, and like the first either going up from the water or coming down.

"Maybe," Claus offered, "it's the same one little animal going back and forth. Do crabs make tracks like that?"

Jen couldn't tell him. "Anyway, let's hope they don't pinch swimmers." She slipped off her short robe and took a running dive into the cool water, whose salt content made it a good match for the seas of Earth. Half a minute later, she and her husband came to the surface together, ten meters or so out from shore. From here they could see west past the next dune. There, a hundred meters distant, underscored by the slanting shadows of the early sun, a whole tangled skein of narrow, fresh-looking tracks connected someplace inland with the sea.

A toss of Jen's head shook water from her long, dark hair. "I wonder if it's some kind of seasonal migration?"

"They certainly weren't there yesterday. I think I've had enough. This water's colder than a bureaucrat's heart."

Walking briskly, they had just re-entered the compound when Jenny touched Claus on the arm. "There's Glenna, at the tractor shed. I'm going to trot over and tell her what we saw."

"All right. I'll fix some coffee."

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Glenna, coming out of the shed a little distance inland from the main house, forestalled Jenny's announcement about the tracks with a vaguely worried question of her own.

"Did you or Claus see or hear anything strange last night, Jenny?"

"Strange? No, I don't think so."

Glenna looked toward a small cluster of more distant outbuildings. "We've just been out there taking a scheduled seismograph reading. It had recorded something rather violent and unusual, at about oh-two-hundred this morning. The thing is, you see, it must have been just about that time that something woke me up. I had the distinct impression that there had been a brilliant flash, somewhere outside."

Ino, also dressed in coveralls this morning, appeared among the distant sheds, trudging toward them. When he arrived, he provided more detail on the seismic event. "Quite sharp and apparently quite localized, not more than ten kilometers from here. Our system triangulated it well. I don't know when we've registered another event quite like it."

"What do you suppose it was?" Jen asked.

Ino hesitated minimally. "It could have been a very small spaceship crashing; or maybe a fairly large aircraft. But the only aircraft on Waterfall are the two little ones we have out in that far shed."

"A meteor, maybe?"

"I rather hope so. Otherwise a spacecraft just might be our most likely answer. And if it were a spacecraft from Brass Trumpet's force coming down here — crippled in the fighting, perhaps — we'd have heard from him on the subject, I should think."

The remaining alternative hung in the air unvoiced. Jenny bit her lip. By now, Brass Trumpet must be long gone from the system, and impossible of recall, his ships outspacing light and radio waves alike in pursuit of the enemy force.

In a voice more worried than before, Glenna was saying: "Of course if it was some enemy unit, damaged in the battle, then I suppose the crash is likely to have completed its destruction."

"I'd better tell you," Jenny blurted in. And in a couple of sentences she described the peculiar tracks.

Ino stared at her with frank dismay. "I was going to roll out an aircraft ... but let me take a look at those tracks first."

The quickest way to reach them was undoubtedly on foot, and the gnarled man trotted off along the beach path at such a pace that Jenny had difficulty keeping up. Glenna remained behind, saying

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she would let Claus know what was going on.

Moving with flashes of former athletic grace, Ino reached the nearest of the tracks and dropped to one knee beside it, just as Claus had done. "Do the others look just like this?"

"As nearly as I could tell. We didn't get close to all of them."

"That's no animal I ever saw." He was up again already, trotting back toward the base. "I don't like it. Let's get airborne, all of us."

"I always pictured berserkers as huge things."

"Most of 'em are. Some are small machines, for specialized purposes."

"I'll run into the house and tell the others to get ready to take off," Jenny volunteered as they sped into the compound.

"Do that. Glenna will know what to bring, I expect. I'll get a flyer rolled out of the shed."

Running, Jen thought as she hurried into the house, gave substance to a danger that might otherwise have existed only in the mind. Could it be that Ino, with the horrors in his memory, was somewhat too easily alarmed where berserkers were concerned?

Glenna and Claus, who had just changed into coveralls, met her in the common room. She was telling them of Ino's decision to take to the air, and thinking to herself that she had better change out of her beach garb also, when the first outcry sounded from somewhere outside. It was less a scream than a baffled-sounding, hysterical laugh.

Glenna pushed past her at once, and in a moment was out the door and running. Exchanging a glance with her husband, Jenny turned and followed, Claus right at her heels.

The strange cry came again. Far ahead, past Glenna's running figure, the door of the aircraft shed had been slid back, and in its opening a white figure appeared outlined. A figure that reeled drunkenly and waved its arms.

Glenna turned aside at the tractor shed, where one of the small ground vehicles stood ready. They were used for riding, hauling, pushing sand, to sculpt a pond into a better shape or slice away part of a too-obtrusive dune. It'll be faster than running, Jenny thought, as she saw the older woman spring into the driver's seat, and heard the motor *whoosh* quietly to life. She leaped aboard too. Claus shoved strongly at her back to make sure she was safely on, before he used both hands for his own grip. A grip was necessary because they were already rolling, and accelerating quickly.

Ino's figure, now just outside the shed, came hurtling closer with their own speed. He shook his arms

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at them again and staggered. Upon his chest he wore a brownish thing the size of a small plate, like some great medallion that was so heavy it almost pulled him down. He clawed at the brown plate with both hands, and suddenly his coveralls in front were splashed with scarlet. He bellowed words which Jenny could not make out.

Claus gripped Glenna's shoulder and pointed. A dozen or more brown plates were scuttling on the brown, packed sand, between the aircraft shed and the onrushing tractor. The tracks they drew were faint replicas of those that had lined the softer sand along the beach. Beneath each saucer-like body, small legs blurred, reminding Claus of something recently seen, something he could not stop to think of now.

The things had nothing like the tractor's speed but still they were in position to cut it off. Glenna swerved no more than slightly, if at all, and one limbed plate disappeared beneath a wheel. It came up at once with the wheel's rapid turning, a brown blur seemingly embedded in the soft, fat tire, resisting somehow the centrifugal force that might have thrown it off.

Ino had gone down with, as Claus now saw, three of the things fastened on his body, but he somehow fought back to his feet just as the tractor jerked to a halt beside him. If Claus could have stopped to analyze his own mental state, he might have said he lacked the time to be afraid. With a blow of his fist he knocked one of the attacking things away from Ino, and felt the surprising weight and hardness of it as a sharp pang up through his wrist.

All three dragging together, they pulled Ino aboard; Glenna was back in the driver's seat at once. Claus kicked another attacker off, then threw open the lid of the tractor's toolbox. He grabbed the longest, heaviest metal tool displayed inside.

A swarm of attackers were between them and the aircraft shed; and the shadowed shape of a flyer, just inside, was spotted with them too. As Glenna gunned the engine, she turned the tractor at the same time, heading back toward the main building and the sea beyond. In the rear seat, Jenny held Ino. He bled on everything, and his eyes were fixed on the sky while his mouth worked in terror. In the front, Claus fought to protect the driver and himself.

A brown plate scuttled onto the cowling, moving for Glenna's hands on the controls. Claus swung, a baseball batter, bright metal blurring at the end of his extended arms. There was a hard, satisfying crunch, as of hard plastic or ceramic cracking through. The

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brown thing fell to the floor, and he caught a glimpse of dull limbs still in motion before he caught it with a foot and kicked it out onto the flying ground.

Another of the enemy popped out from somewhere onto the dash. He pounded at it, missed when it seemed to dodge his blows. He cracked its body finally; but still it clung on under the steering column, hard to get at, inching toward Glenna's fingers. Claus grabbed it with his left hand, felt a lance. Not until he had thrown the thing clear of the tractor did he look at his hand and see two fingers nearly severed.

At the same moment, the tractor engine died, and they were rolling to a silent stop, with the sea and the small dock Glenna had been steering for only a few meters ahead. Under the edge of the engine cowling another of the enemy appeared, thrusting forward a limb that looked like a pair of ceramic pliers, shredded electrical connectors dangling in its grip.

The humans abandoned the tractor in a wordless rush. Claus, one hand helpless and dripping blood, aided the women with Ino as best he could. Together they half-dragged, half-carried him across the dock and rolled him into a small, open boat, the only craft at once available. In moments Glenna had freed them from the dock and started the motor, and they were headed out away from shore.

Away from shore, but not into the sea. They were separated from deep-blue and choppy ocean by a barrier reef or causeway, one of the features that had made this coast desirable for the life-seeding base. The reef, a basically natural structure of sand and rock deposited by waves and currents, was about a hundred meters from the shore, and stretched in either direction as far as vision carried. Running from beach to reef, artificial walls or low causeways of fused rock separated ponds of various sizes.

"We're in a kind of square lagoon here," Glenna told Jenny, motioning for her to take over the job of steering. "Head for that far corner. If we can get there ahead of them, we may be able to lift the boat over the reef and get out."

Jen nodded, taking the controls. Glenna slid back to a place beside her husband, snapped open the boat's small first-aid kit, and began applying pressure bandages.

Claus started to try to help, saw the world beginning to turn gray around him, and slumped back against the gunwale; no use to anyone if he passed out. Ino looked as if he had been attacked, not by teeth or claws or knives, but by several sets of nail-pullers and wire-cutters. His chest still rose and fell, but his eyes were closed now and he

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was gray with shock. Glenna draped a thermal blanket over him.

Jen was steering around the rounded structure, not much bigger than a phone booth, protruding above the water in the middle of the pond. Most of the ponds and bays had similar observation stations. Claus had looked into one or two and he thought now that there was nothing in them likely to be of any help. More first-aid kits, perhaps — but what Ino needed was the big medirobot back at the house.

And he was not going to get it. By now the building complex must be overrun by the attackers. Berserkers ...

"Where can we find weapons?" Claus croaked at Glenna.

"Let's see that hand. I can't do any more for Ino now ... I'll bandage this. If you mean guns, there are a couple at the house, somewhere in storage. We can't go back there now."

"I know."

Glenna had just let go his hand when from the front seat there came a scream. Claws and a brown saucer-shape were climbing in over the gunwale at Jenny's side. Had the damned thing come aboard somehow with them, from the tractor? Or was this pond infested with them too?

In his effort to help drag Ino to the boat, Claus had abandoned his trusty wrench beside the tractor. He grabbed now for the best substitute at hand, a small anchor at the end of a chain. His overhand swing missed Jenny's head by less than he had planned, but struck the monster like a mace. It fell into the bottom of the boat, vibrating its limbs, as Claus thought, uselessly; then he realized that it was making a neat hole.

His second desperation-swing came down upon it squarely. One sharp prong of the anchor broke a segment of the brown casing clean away, and something sparked and sizzled when the sea came rushing in —

— seawater rushing —

— into the bottom of the boat —

The striking anchor had enlarged the hole that the enemy had begun. The bottom was split, the boat was taking water fast.

Someone grabbed up the sparking berserker, inert now save for internal fireworks, and hurled it over the side. Glenna threw herself forward, taking back the wheel, and Jenny scrambled aft, to help one-handed Claus with bailing.

The boat limped, staggered, gulped water and wallowed on toward the landbar. It might get them that far, but forget the tantalizing freedom of blue surf beyond...

Jenny started to say something to her husband, then almost shrieked again, as Ino's hand, re-

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surgently alive, came up to catch her wrist. The old man's eyes were fixed on hers with a tremendous purpose. He gasped out words, and then fell back unable to do more.

The words first registered with Jenny as: "... need them ... do the splashers ..." It made no sense.

Glenna looked back briefly, then had to concentrate on boat-handling. In another moment the fractured bottom was grating over rock. Claus scrambled out and held the prow against the above-water portion of the reef. The women followed, got their footing established outside the boat, then turned to lift at Ino's inert form.

Jenny paused. "Glenna, I'm afraid he's gone."

"No!" Denial was fierce and absolute. "Help me!"

Jen almost started to argue, then gave in. They got Ino up into a fireman's-carry position on Claus's shoulders; even with a bad hand he was considerably stronger than either of the women. Then the three began to walk east along the reef. At high tide, as now, it was a strip of land no more than three or four meters wide, its low crest half a meter above the water. Waves of any size broke over it. Fortunately today the surf was almost calm.

Claus could feel the back of his coverall and neck wetting with Ino's blood. He shifted the dead weight on his shoulders. All right, so far. But his free hand, mutilated, throbbed.

He asked: "How far are we going, Glenna?"

"I don't know." The woman paced ahead — afraid to look at her husband now? — staring into the distance. "There isn't any place. Keep going."

Jenny and Claus exchanged looks. For want of any better plan at the moment, they kept going. Jen took a look back. "They're on the reef, and on the shore, too, following us. A good distance back."

Claus looked, and looked again a minute later. Brown speckles by the dozen followed, but were not catching up. Not yet.

Now they were passing the barrier of fused rock separating the pond in which they had abandoned the boat from its neighbor. The enemy moving along the shore would intercept them, or very nearly, if they tried to walk the barrier back to land.

Ahead, the reef still stretched interminably into a sun-dazzled nothingness.

"What's in this next pond, Glenna?" Claus asked, and knew a measure of relief when the gray-haired woman gave a little shake of her head and answered sensibly.

"Grouper. Some other fish as food stock for them. Why?"

"Just wondering. What'll we run into if we keep on going in this

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direction?"

"This just goes on. Kilometer after kilometer. Ponds, and bays, and observation stations — I say keep going because otherwise they'll catch us. What do you think we ought to do?"

Claus abruptly stopped walking, startling the women. He let the dead man slide down gently from his shoulders. Jen looked at her husband, examined Ino, shook her head.

Claus said: "I think we've got to leave him."

Glenna looked down at Ino's body once, could not keep looking at him. She nodded fiercely, and once more led the way.

A time of silent walking passed before Jenny at Claus's side began: "If they're berserkers..."

"What else?"

"Well, why aren't we all dead already? They don't seem very ... efficiently designed for killing."

"They must be specialists," Claus mused. "Only a small part of a large force, a part Brass Trumpet missed when the rest moved on or was destroyed. Remember, we were wondering if Atlantis was their real target? These are special machines, built for ... underwater work, maybe. Their ship must have been wrecked in the fighting and had to come down. When they found themselves on this planet they must have come down to the sea for a reconniassance, and then decided to attack first by land. Probably they saw the lights of the base before they crash-landed. They know which life-form they have to deal with first, on any planet. Not very efficient, as you say. But they'll keep coming at us till they're all smashed or we're all dead."

Glenna had slowed her pace a little and was looking toward the small observation post rising in the midst of the pond that they were passing. "I don't think there's anything in any of these stations that can help us. But I can't think of anywhere else to turn."

Claus asked: "What's in the next pond after this?"

"Sharks ... ah. That might be worth a try. Sometimes they'll snap at anything that moves. They're small ones, so I think our risk will be relatively small if we wade out to the middle."

Claus thought to himself that he would rather end in the belly of a live shark than be torn to pieces by an impersonal device. Jen was willing also to take the chance.

They did not pause again till they were on the brink of the shark pond. Then Glenna said: "The water will be no more than three or four feet deep the way we're going. Stay together and keep splashing as we go. Claus, hold that bad hand up; mustn't drip a taste of blood into the water."

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And in they went. Only when they were already splashing waist-deep did Claus recall Ino's blood wetting the back of his coverall. But he was not going to stop just now to take it off.

The pond was not very large; a minute of industrious wading, and they were climbing unmolested over the low, solid railing of the observation post rising near its middle. Here was space for two people to sit comfortably, sheltered from weather by a transparent dome and movable side panels. In the central console were instruments that continually monitored the life in the surrounding pond. Usually, of course, the readings from all ponds would be monitored in the more convenient central station attached to the house.

The three of them squeezed in, and Glenna promptly opened a small storage locker. It contained a writing instrument that looked broken, a cap perhaps left behind by some construction worker, and a small spider — another immigrant from Earth, of course — who might have been blown out here by the wind. That was all.

She slammed the locker shut again. "No help. So now it's a matter of waiting. They'll obviously come after us through the water. The sharks may snap up some of them before they reach us. Then we must be ready to move on before we are surrounded. It's doubtful, and risky, but I can't think of anything else to try."

Claus frowned. "Eventually we'll have to circle around, get back to the buildings."

Jen frowned at him. "The berserkers are there, too."

"I don't think they will be, now. You see —"

Glenna broke in: "Here they come."

The sun had climbed, and was starting to get noticeably hot. It came to Claus's mind, not for the first time since their flight had started, that there was no water for them to drink. He held his left arm up with his right, trying to ease the throbbing.

Along the reef where they had walked, along the parallel shore — and coming now over the barrier from the grouper pond — plate-sized specks of brown death were flowing. There were several dozen of them, moving more slowly than hurried humans could move, almost invisible in the shimmer of sun and sea. Some plopped into the water of the shark pond as Claus watched.

"I can't pick them up underwater," Glenna announced. She was twiddling the controls of the station's instruments, trying to catch the enemy on one of the screens meant for observing marine life. "Sonar ... motion detectors ...

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water's too murky for simple video."

Understanding dawned for Claus. "That's why they're not metal! Why they're comparatively fragile. They're designed for avoiding detection by underwater defenses, on Atlantis I suppose, for infiltrating and disabling them."

Jen was standing. "We'd better get moving before we're cut off."

"In another minute." Glenna was still switching from one video pickup to another around the pond. "I'm sure we have at least that much to spare ... ah."

One of the enemy had appeared on screen, sculling toward the camera at a modest pace. It looked less lifelike than it had in earlier moments of arm's-length combat.

Now, entering the picture from the rear, a shark.

Claus was not especially good on distinguishing marine species. But this portentous and somehow familiar shape was identifiable at once, not to be confused even by the non-expert, it seemed, with that of any other kind of fish.

Claus started to say, He's going right past. But the shark was not. Giving the impression of afterthought, the torpedo-shape swerved back. Its mouth opened and the berserker device was gone.

The people watching made wordless sounds. But Jen took the others by an arm apiece. "We can't bet all of them will be eaten — let's get moving."

Claus already had one leg over the station's low railing when the still surface of the pond west of the observation post exploded. Leaping clear of the water, the premiere killer of Earth's oceans twisted in mid-air, as if trying to snap at its own belly. It fell back, vanishing in a hill of lashed-up foam. A moment later it jumped again, still thrashing.

In the fraction of a second when the animal was clearly visible, Claus watched the dark line come into being across its white belly as if traced there by an invisible pen. It was a short line that a moment later broadened and evolved in blood. As the fish rolled on its back something dark and pointed came into sight, spreading the edges of the hole. Then the convulsing body of the shark had vanished, in an eruption of water turned opaque with its blood.

The women were wading quickly away from the platform in the opposite direction, calling him to follow, hoping aloud that the remaining sharks would be drawn to the dying one. But for one moment longer Claus lingered, staring at the screen. It showed the roiling bloody turmoil of killer fish converging, and out of this cloud the little berserker emerged, unfazed by shark's teeth or digestion, resuming its

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methodical progress toward the humans, the life-units that could be really dangerous to the cause of death.

Jen tugged at her husband, got him moving with them. In her exhausted brain a nonsense-rhyme was being generated: *Bloody water hides the slasher, seed them, heed them, sue the splashers...*

No!

As the three completed their water-plowing dash to the east edge of the pond, and climbed out, Jenny took Glenna by the arm. "Something just came to me. When I was tending Ino — he said something before he died."

They were walking east along the barrier reef again. "He said smashers," Jen continued. "That was it. Lead them or feed them, to the smashers. But I still don't understand —"

Glenna stared at her for a moment, an almost frightening gaze. Then she stepped between the young couple and pulled them forward.

Two ponds down she turned aside, wading through water that splashed no higher than their calves, directly toward another observation post that looked just like the last.

"We won't be bothered in here," she assured them. "We're too big. Of course, of course. Oh, Ino. I should have thought of this myself. Unless we should happen to step right on one, but there's very little chance of that. They wait in ambush most of the time, in holes or under rocks."

"They?" Injury and effort were taking toll on Claus. He leaned on Jenny's shoulder now.

Glenna glanced back impatiently. "Mantis shrimp is the common name. They're stomatopods, actually."

"Shrimp?" The dazed query was so soft that she may not have heard it.

A minute later they were squeezed aboard the station and could rest again. Above, clean morning clouds were building to enormous height, clouds that might have formed in the unbreathed air of Earth five hundred million years before.

"Claus," Jen asked, when both of them had caught their breath a little, "what were you saying a while ago, about circling back to the house?"

"It's this way," he said, and paused to organize his thoughts. "We've been running to nowhere, because there's nowhere on this world we can get help. *But the berserkers can't know that.* I'm assuming they haven't scouted the whole planet, but just crash-landed on it. For all they know, there's another colony of humans just down the coast. Maybe a town, with lots of

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people, aircraft, weapons.... so for them it's an absolute priority to cut us off before we can give a warning. Therefore every one of their units must be committed to the chase. And if we can once get through them or around them, we can outrun them home, to vehicles and guns and food and water. How we get through them or around them I haven't figured out yet. But I don't see any other way."

"We'll see," said Glenna. Jen held his hand, and looked at him as if his idea might be reasonable. A distracting raindrop hit him on the face, and suddenly a shower was spattering the pond. With open mouths the three survivors caught what drops they could. They tried spreading Jenny's robe out to catch more, but the rain stopped before the cloth was wet.

"Here they come," Glenna informed them, shading her eyes from re-emergent sun. She started tuning up the observing gear aboard the station.

Claus counted brown saucer-shapes dropping into the pond. Only nineteen, after all.

"Again, I can't find them with the sonar," Glenna muttered. "We'll try the television — there."

A berserker unit — for all the watching humans could tell, it was the same one that the shark had swallowed — was centimetering its tireless way toward them, walking the bottom in shallow, sunlit water. Death was walking. A living thing might run more quickly, for a time, but life would tire. Or let life oppose it, if life would. Already it had walked through a shark, as easily as traversing a mass of seaweed.

"There,". Glenna breathed again. The advancing enemy had detoured slightly around a rock, and a moment later a dancing ripple of movement had emerged from hiding somewhere to follow in its path. The pursuer's score or so of tiny legs supported in flowing motion a soft-looking, roughly segmented tubular body. Its sinuous length was about the same as the enemy machine's diameter, but in contrast the follower was aglow with life, gold marked in detail with red and green and brown, like banners carried forward above an advancing column. Long antennae waved as if for balance above bulbous, short-stalked eyes. And underneath the eyes a coil of heavy forelimbs rested, not used for locomotion.

"*Odonodactylus syllarus,*" Glenna murmured. "Not the biggest species — but maybe big enough."

"What are they?" Jen's voice was a prayerful whisper.

"Well, predators ..."

The berserker, intent on its own prey, ignored the animate ripple that was overtaking it, until the

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smasher had closed almost to contact range. The machine paused then, and started to turn.

Before it had rotated itself more than halfway its brown body was visibly jerked forward, under some striking impetus from the smasher too fast for human eyes to follow. The *krak!* of it came clearly through the audio pickup. Even before the berserker had regained its balance, it put forth a tearing-claw like that which had opened the shark's gut from inside.

Again the invisible impact flicked from a finger-length away. At each spot where one of the berserker's feet touched bottom, a tiny spurt of sand jumped up with the transmitted shock. Its tearing claw now dangled uselessly, hard ceramic cracked clean across.

"I've never measured a faster movement by anything that lives. They strike with special dactyls — well, with their elbows, you might say. They feed primarily on hard-shelled crabs and clams and snails. That was just a little one, that Ino gave you as a joke. One as long as my hand can hit something like a four-millimeter bullet — and some of these are longer."

Another hungry smasher was now coming swift upon the track of the brown, shelled thing that looked so like a crab. The second smasher's eyes moved on their stalks, calculating distance. It was evidently of a different species than the first, being somewhat larger and of a variant coloration. Even as the berserker, which had just put out another tool, sharp and wiry, and cut its first assailant neatly in half, turned back, Claus saw — or almost saw or imagined that he saw — the newcomer's longest pair of forelimbs unfold and return. Again grains of sand beneath the two bodies, living and unliving, jumped from the bottom. With the concussion white radii of fracture sprang out across a hard, brown surface ...

Four minutes later the three humans were still watching, in near-perfect silence. A steady barrage of *kraks,* from every region of the pond, were echoing through the audio pickups. The video screen still showed the progress of the first individual combat.

"People sometimes talk about sharks as being agressive, as terrible killing machines. Gram for gram, I don't think they're at all in the same class."

The smashing stomatopod, incongruously shrimplike, gripping with its six barb-studded smaller forelimbs the ruined casing of its victim — from which a single ceramic walking-limb still thrashed — began to drag it back to the rock from which its ambush had been launched. Once there, it propped the interstellar terror in place, a Lilliputian monster blacksmith ar-

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ranging metal against anvil. At the next strike, imaginable if not visible as a double backhand snap from the fists of a karate master, fragments of tough casing literally flew through the water, mixed now with a spill of delicate components. What, no soft, delicious meat in sight as yet? Then *smash* again ...

An hour after the audio pickups had reported their last *krak*, the three humans walked toward home, unmolested through the shallows and along a shore where no brown saucers moved.

When Ino had been brought home, and Claus's hand seen to, the house was searched for enemy survivors. Guns were got out, and the great gates in the sand-walls closed to be on the safe side. Then the two young people sent Glenna to a sedated rest.

Her voice was dazed, and softly, infinitely tired. "Tomorrow we'll feed them, something real."

"This afternoon," said Claus. "When you wake up. Show me what to do."

"Look at this," called Jen a minute later, from the common room.

One wall of the smallest aquarium had been shattered outward. Its tough glass lay sharded on the carpet, along with a large stain of water and the soft body of a small creature, escaped and dead.

Jen picked it up. It was much smaller than its cousins out in the pond, but now she could not mistake the shape, even curled loosely in her palm.

Her husband came in and looked over her shoulder. "Glenna's still muttering. She just told me they can stab, too, if they sense soft meat in contact. Spear-tips on their smashers when they unfold them all the way. So you couldn't hold him like that if he was still alive." Claus's voice broke suddenly, in a delayed reaction.

"Oh, yes I could." Jen's voice too. "Oh, yes I could indeed."

ANSWER TO JULY ACROSTIC

Quotation: Homer tried very hard to be the kind of man he assumed Elinor admired. He bought a crash helmet. It now hung in a noticeable place on the wall of his apartment. He knew he couldn't buy a motorcycle.

Author and work: Georgia F. Adams, "A Kitten for Elinor."

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There is a trade-off to mutual disadvantage surrounding the Panshins' *Science Fiction In Dimension:* most of this study's reviewers have pointed out, correctly enough, that Panshin deals with the enclosed universe of science fiction and appears to have a shaky critical background in the general literature of which science fiction is (however important) merely a genre ... but Panshin is correct as well in pointing out that these reviewers, feasting upon that one point, have simply failed to read his book and deal with his argument.

I think this is too bad ... in certain ways *SF In Dimension* is the most important of all the books about science fiction that have poured into the markets in the last five years. It is a tentative, unformed work in many ways, composed of essays published years apart over a long period of time, and by Panshin's own testimony it is only a step toward a much larger critical history which he is now writing ... but if I read his argument correctly, it has been carefully worked out and offers, as they like to say in the trade, fascinating leads.

I am going, be warned, to attempt to summarize the central argument of *SF In Dimension* in a very few paragraphs ... human metaphysic, that indecipherable

BARRY N. MALZBERG

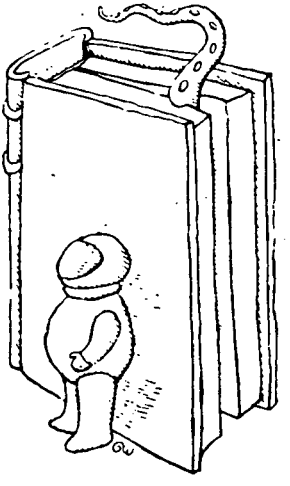
Books

Science Fiction in Dimension: A Book of Explorations, by Alexei & Cory Panshin; Advent Publishers, $10.00.

Science Fiction At Large: A Collection of Essays About The Interface Between Science Fiction and Reality, edited by Peter Nicholls; Harper & Row, $8.95.

The Best of Philip K. Dick, Introduction by John Brunner, Ballantine, Del Rey Books, $1.95.

The Perfect Lover, by Christopher Priest, Charles Scribner's Sons, $7.95.



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mystery, has historically been the central obsession of fantasy literature, of which what we call "modern science fiction" is the contemporary result. "Modern science fiction," however, is essentially a long and misguided detour from the main line of fantasy, which was to explicate in all of its richness the human condition and human potential. "Modern science fiction," as virtually conceived and dictated by the late John W. Campbell, was a bastardization of these more noble purposes; Campbell's post-technological, engineer's approach stated that science fiction was best expressed as a series of working models for a chartable universe. (Whereas pre-Campbell science fiction, both in the genre magazines and without, yea even unto Jules Verne, held at the core that the universe was basically *not* chartable.)

Just as it took post-technological western culture about thirty years — from the end of the second world war to the present — to run itself into exhaustion and the abandonment of belief in easy solutions, so it took "modern science fiction" about an equivalent period of time to burn itself out ... there is, according to Panshin, a clear line from the enthusiastic we - engineers - can-make-the-universe-work of early Heinlein to the post-apocalyptic exhaustion of a J.G. Ballard or a Thomas Disch. By the mid nineteen seventies, science fiction, as posited by Campbell, had become a decadent literature whose sole driving force was that technology could not work; behind that outpost were imitative writers merely repeating with less energy the formulas of thirty years past. The direction which Campbell offered, Panshin states, was an essential and counterproductive mistake; the developmental line of science fiction should have run on from Ray Cummings and early Raymond Z. Gallun and now, decades later, just as western society is beginning to regenerate on mystical/religious lines, so is science fiction showing similar indications of breakthrough via mystical referent. Just as it is the transcendence of technology in the west which will give us the New Man*, so it is the reconstitution in science fiction of its abused and discredited sense of wonder which will be the cutting edge of that New Man's future.

I think Panshin's argument is important ... to the best of my knowledge this is the first time that anyone (other than Panshin) has

*Or of course New Woman. New Person. This is as good a place as any to also apologize, despite the byline, for appearing to credit most of the book only to Alexei Panshin ... although many of the ideas expressed here Alexei was expressing in print and person before his marriage.

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taken the time to articulate it, however superficially, in one of the mass media of our small field. The fact that Panshin finds Your Faithful Correspondent (and Robert Silverberg) as prime exhausted examples of the Literature of Exhaustion does not make his argument any less provocative ... nor does the fact that Panshin indeed is unaware of the relationship of much "modern science fiction" to "modern fiction." This book is a polemic, and within its context Panshin is functioning as a polemicist ... and consistency is not one of the pamphleteer's necessary virtues. Many of the breakthroughs in political or social thought have originally appeared as broadsides. I think that Panshin is deliberately putting an extreme point to his thesis, in short, and although it is not to the stylistic or structural benefit of *SF In Dimension* it falls within the range of rhetorical license.

Fantasy may not be an expression of metaphysic, but its avoidance; science fiction may not be the cutting edge of the future but (with Brian Stableford) the attempt to make the present habitable for the alienated by trivializing the future. And there is place for a long essay in response to Panshin's thesis. But the fact that *SF In Dimension* would be worth an essay almost as long in rebuttal, the fact that its insights will exist disturbingly on the periphery of what every ambitious writer will be trying to do in this genre for the rest of the century ... that set of facts in itself makes it regrettable that a year and a half after its publication this is, I believe, the first major attention this book has received. It is too bad. It is a worthy and provocative accomplishment.

Science Fiction at Large is a collection of essays originally delivered orally (except by Phil Dick, who was absent) at a symposium on science fiction organized by Peter Nicholls for the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London in 1975. Contributors seem to be evenly split between science fiction writers — Harry Harrison, Ursula K. LeGuin, Thomas M. Disch, Robert Sheckley, Philip K. Dick — and folks of academic persuasion: Edward de Bono, John Taylor, Alan Garner and Peter Nicholls, with the popular writer Alvin Toffler somewhere in the middle. These essays, for delivery in 1975, were thus probably prepared in 1974, published in England in 1976, published by Harper & Row here in 1977 and reviewed in 1978 ... and the essays deal with a perceived reality which for their writers is about a decade older than that, and *peace* Alexei, is science fiction the cutting edge of the future or merely the endless reformulation of the past?

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The subtitle "... about the interface between science fiction and reality" is one of those catch-alls needed in academia; this is a scattered and uneven group of essays which share only the conviction (except for Thomas M. Disch) that science fiction is no unworthy object of passion. Yet there is another shared assumption here, not articulated, which binds all of the disparate points of view: science fiction is worthy of critical and popular respect only to the degree to which it *does* function as interface, brings its audience into deeper perception of the realities of their condition. Science fiction as a tool, in short. Good Campbellian rhetoric. Disch excoriates most of it (correctly) for constructing infantile paradigms, Brunner for crackpotism, Nicholls for preciousness, Sheckley for solemnity, LeGuin for ignoring the Ageless Common Reader. The academics and Harrison on the other hand see hope because SF has energy and topic. (That most of the writers are disaffected and most of the academics charmed may only be another example of Herovit's Principal: to really know sf is to love it the less if honor more.)

But what if Panshin is right? What if all of us honorable people, writers, critics and scholars, have been in fundamental misapprehension all along, and what if science fiction's optimum function is not to demonstrate reality (a purpose served better by literary or even commercial novels), but to take us into awareness of our potentials *beyond* reality? What if the fundamental assumption upon which fifty years of modern American science fiction and criticism have been based — the Campbell assumption of a rational universe to be slowly uncovered by its writers; science fiction indeed as interface — well, what if that assumption is *wrong?* What if Tom Disch and Ursula LeGuin's promised land turns into T.S. Eliot's landscape? What, in short, what if Campbell was an *aberration* and contemporary scholarly perceptions wrong in seeing that the development of the form has not been evolutionary but instead merely a thirty-five year detour into a blind alley as ornately decorated as the interiors of expensive sect churches? What then?

Well, what then indeed? No serious writer can do a body of work in this or any field and not at some point confront at least the possibility that he might have been completely wrong in all of the unstated assumptions underlying his work ... and I have been in that territory more than intermittently recently. In the meantime it is a pleasure to say that Disch, for all the good it will do, has much vicious, satirical fun, that Nicholls undercuts academic pomposity as

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no outsider could do, that Brunner explains perhaps for the first time why science fiction readers are made uneasy by the advertisers in science fiction magazine classifieds. (All those prayer wheels and secret clubs come too close to the true unconscious needs of these readers, you see.) That Sheckley is self-mocking and invigorating at the same time, an artful combination if you can do it. That Alan Garner has a true sense of mystery. And that Alvin Toffler, probably never having attended a science fiction convention thinks that we're "pro-human and thank you very much." Thank you very much too, Mr. Toffler.

As someone said a long time ago in another land about another book, I find the existence of *Science Fiction At Large* makes me uneasy, and I am not even sure that it needed to have been done in this way ... but it is an important book because its theme is important, and Nicholls, for putting it all together and entering it in the permanent record, deserves praise.

Philip K. Dick, in his Institute essay, talks about his basic theme being the intersection of dreams and reality with, perhaps, dreams being the winner on a successful extra point kick. Dick is a very significant writer, rightly regarded as one of the most important in the history of the genre, but his work in the last ten years has had the self-consciousness of someone paying too much attention to critics and too little to his inner voice. For what it is worth I don't think that Dick's theme was about levels of reality or the controlling aspects of dreams at all until he began to read the blurbs above his stories and fan magazine reviews. I think that Dick, in his creative prime, was really our first and best exponent of craziness.

Science fiction is a crazy form of literature — there is no reason why it should be otherwise, and it is impossible to do creditable work of any kind in this genre unless one is at least in touch with one's potential for insanity — and Dick was the first modern writer within the genre to codify it, to give technological weight and heft to madness.

And here, in *The Best of Philip K. Dick,* a good representative collection drawn more of necessity from the first half of his career (like many of us Dick virtually stopped writing short stories after he found he could sell novels), are all these coins. "Imposter," whose protagonist turns out to unconsciously be the Alien Among Us; "Colony," in which paranoia becomes an entire planet which creates malevolent physical substitutes for those near and dear (I have had the feeling); "Oh, To Be A Blobel!" which, its

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artifacts stripped, is the ultimate science fiction story about marriage.

There is the craziness, but there was in the early Phil Dick another theme which to the best of my knowledge has never been picked up on in criticism: Dick wrote painfully about near-future war and the integration of war into the social system, and stories like "Foster You're Dead" showed more than a moderate amount of courage for their time, the dark center of the nineteen fifties. If craziness was his second grand theme, war was his first, and in 1966 came time travel ... the most recent story in this book and the only short story Dick has published since 1974 is the brilliant paradox story "A Little Something For Us Tempunauts."

Dick has begun to receive his due in recent years. His work is largely back in print, he has been called by a *Rolling Stone* reporter in a major profile "the best living science fiction writer," he is beginning to generate the kind of income and audience he has deserved since at least 1954 and *Solar Lottery*. I think that there are limitations to this writer — for one thing what I once took to be a stylistic clumsiness I now think came only from the necessity to publish, in essence, first drafts — but even the limitations are to be celebrated. He has been a science fiction writer for a quarter of a century and has never, to the best of my knowledge, published a single story out of cynicism or contempt. Ears and half a tail at least.

Christopher Priest's *The Perfect Lover* is an intricately peopled but relatively slenderly plotted novel anent a mind-transference scheme; in 1985 (as always, I suppose) Britain is falling apart and a group of its best scientific minds are enlisted by an ambitious government project to have their consciousnesses taken forward to an idealized time when these social problems have been solved. The scientific minds are supposed to gather detail on how the future survived it all; bring it back to present time. Such is the sophistication (Panshin would say decadence) of science fiction that what would have been an unusual plot ten years ago is now relatively familiar. (I have done a few myself.) The test is no longer what is done but how: the changes Priest can ring upon the schism between present and future, between the barren lives of the projectees and the richer lives conducted under the hypnotics, upon the shifting realities of present and future, the interplay between them.

All of this is worked out pretty well by Priest, who has not failed as well in loading into his metaphor sufficient standard plot elements —

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villainous scientist, ex-lover in thrall, romantic triangle, etc. etc. — to keep the book functioning at the level of narrative interest. The resolution fits into the category of "surprise" and should be left to discover, although anyone who has been paying attention and has reasonable acquaintance with Priest's work (and the work of his influences) will not be jolted.

Priest, a good and extremely underrated British writer (he won third prize in the 1972 John W. Campbell Memorial Award competition for *Darkening Island* but has otherwise, despite good output, received relatively little critical attention in America) is going, I suspect, to have a major career if he will have the wit to attend to the implicit message of Philip K. Dick. It *is* a crazy category; one must loosen up, rather. So glittering and cold is Priest's sanity that his example of madness would suit us all.

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"There's one of the real old timers!"

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We're happy to be the first to publish this story by Rod Keen. It has been languishing unread since 1966 on the shelves of a certain library in San Francisco. Richard Brautigan was head librarian of this institution, which stocked only stories hand-delivered by authors and never loaned them out. The curious may refer to Brautigan's account of his tenure as librarian for details about this peculiar repository. It reports the little we know of Rod Keen, which is that he is a San Francisco sewer worker who also writes science-fiction.

It's The Queen Of Darkness, Pal

by ROD KEEN*

1.

All day long, Red McCune worked the city like a galley slave. Ben Hur toiled to pull his beautiful many-decked ship across the waters. Red worked to hose and push ugly single-decked pieces of crap down the stream. They were his burden, and Red, always the poet, had once called the burdens fardels. His partner, "Ringo" Ringgold, had said, "What?"

"*...who would fardels bear, to grunt and sweat under a weary life...*"

"OK, what's a fardel?" Ringo's expression showed he thought it was something related to passing gas. That was what working in the sewers did to a man.

"It's a word used by a colleague of mine," Red had said. "A fellow poet. Bill, the Bard of Avon."

"Oh, God, not another one?" Ringo had said. "What's he doing down here?"

"Keeping me company."

Ringo grunted. If the subject had been World War II Japanese, Ringo wouldn't have stopped talking. He'd been one of the first of the black Marines to be shipped off to the South Pacific to kill or be killed or maybe both. Ringo opted for survival and came back with a potful of mementos and a lot of stories.

"I admired them little yellow bastards," he'd once told Red. "Only, they wasn't yellow. They stood up to us whites like real men."

Red had rolled his eyes then, and Ringo had said quickly, "You know what I mean. All us Americans was white as far as the Nips was concerned."

Ringo was a little peculiar. That could have been blamed on the Ma-

* *From THE ABORTION: AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE. 1966. published by Simon & Schuster. Copyright © 1970. 1971 Richard Brautigan.*

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rines, but Red thought that it was the sewer that had done it to Ringo. It did it to all the workers, including himself. The darkness, the garbage and trash on the dark waters, the gases, the heat, these made a pressure cooker that a salesman couldn't have given away.

Red raked in a high-button shoe and looked at it before throwing it back in. Some happy young 1909 beauty had worn that. She never would have believed that she'd be wrinkled and bent and open at the seams, her breath and soul sour, and living off welfare. Out of style, out of time, just like her shoe.

Gas is the pessimism of the belly, and pessimism is the gas of the soul. Red suffered a lot from both. But he considered himself to be both a poet and the archaeologist of the living. One way to pass the time, and the gas, was to imagine he was an archaeologist. Forget what he knew about the actualities. Imagine he was reconstructing the civilization above only on the basis of what floated by and what he hosed down.

It was a strange world up there. Once there were many condoms floating by, but now there were few. This meant that they'd had overpopulation up there, and the rubber factories had been working overtime. One day, the rubbers became fewer, and in a few months where they had once been schools of little white fish, bobbing and turning and nosing each other affectionately, they were loners. No one to nuzzle or play tag with.

From this Red deduced that something terrible had happened up there. It was the Red Masque all over again, though this time it wasn't red spots on the skin but impotency. The thing in the masque walked through the streets of Golden Gate City, touching this one and that one with his wand. It made no difference who the men were: bankers, gangsters, fuzz, pushers, All-Americans, beatniks, carry-out boys, wardheelers, astrologers, talk-show hosts. They went limp as cigarettes dropped into the toilet.

Red got a lot of satisfaction from this image. He was so ugly that very few women would have anything to do with him, and those that would he wanted nothing to do with. It was a case of like repulsing like.

Red thought of himself as another Quasimodo. Where the hunchback hung around the steeple, way up there, Red chose to get down under. Heights made him dizzy, anyway.

Sometimes, he got too involved in his picture of a dwindling population. When he crawled out of the manhole at quitting time, he was surprised that the streets weren't empty after all.

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"Dead and don't know it," he'd mutter.

Today Red was working out his archaeology on the basis of the quality of the excrement going by in convoys. When he'd started working, twelve years ago, the brown gondolas that steamed on by, pushing toward their ports, the sausage-shaped gondolas floating through their dark Venice, had been of superior quality. Nothing to compare with the stuff in his grandfather's outhouse, of course, not Grade AA, but still Grade A. The stuff he encountered now, these were World War I U-boats compared to the magnificent Queen Elizabeths, the Titanics and Lusitanias that had, relatively speaking, graced the beer-brown seas. In those days even the bumboats, the stuff from the poor, were superior to the best from the rich of 1966. And if today's droppings were so bad, think of what he'd have to put up with in 1976.

Red didn't know what was causing the degeneracy. Was it DDT and artificial fertilizers and too much sugar? We are what we eat, and what we are includes thoughts. The stomach is the shadow of the mind, and where the mind goes, the stomach follows.

You wouldn't have got stuff like that from Socrates or Kant. They were thinkers; modern philosophers were stinkers.

"Hey, Red, what you dreaming about?" Ringo said.

"Socrates," Red said.

"Oh, you mean that Greek cook at Captain Nemo's Submarine Sandwiches? Yeah, his food ain't what it used to be. But where the hell is it?"

"That's what I was thinking,"

"Better stop thinking and get your ass in gear," Ringo said. "The inspector's coming through today. Say, what's Ernie doing, anyway? He must be goofing off too. There ain't no hose going up there."

Red looked up the tunnel. For a hundred yards it went straight as an ex-con claimed to be and then curved out of sight. The corner gave off a dim light like a glowworm in heat. It came from the lamp in Ernie Mazzeo's helmet. This helmet was like a miner's, though Ernie wasn't digging coal. Ernie dug hardly anything, which was why he would just as soon be down here as up there.

"Maybe I ought to wake him up," Red said. "The inspector'll fire him if he catches him sleeping."

Red's lamp was shining down on the waters, which was why he was the first to notice the almost black stuff in the dark-brown liquid. It looked like an octopus that had been caught under a steamroller.

"What's that?" he said.

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"If I didn't know better," Ringo said, "I'd say it was blood."

Ernie's head floated by. His mouth was open, and his teeth shone in the beam. There was enough gold in them to make it worthwhile to mine Ernie.

2.

The police came first, then the ambulance, then Inspector Bleek. The detectives questioned McCune and Ringgold, took pictures, made measurements, and put Ernie's parts in a pile. These included the head, the severed arms and legs, and the heart. The genitals were missing. They might have been thrown into the sewage and had floated by unnoticed by the two workers. Nobody thought so. Richie Washington and Abdul Y had been cut apart and their heads and limbs recovered. But their genitals were still missing. The theory was that the killer had taken them with him. No one knew why he had done this, but the sale of mountain oysters at the restaurants had dropped to almost nothing.

"You two'll have to come down to headquarters," Lt. Hallot said.

"Don't you worry, boys," Bleek said, his voice thick as dipped honey. "I'll see that you get a lawyer and bail. I take care of my men."

He put his arm around Red and then around Ringo to show that he played no favorites.

"They're not under arrest," Hallot said. "I just want them to make complete statements."

"Take the rest of the day off when they're through with you," Bleek said. "God! What kind of a monster is loose down here? Why'd he picking on sewer workers? Richie last month and Abdul the month before? What's he got against you guys? Us, I mean. Or is it a conspiracy by some underground outfit? Are they trying to foul up the sewer system so the city'll get sick?"

Bleek looked as upset as Red felt. He was a big man, about a head taller than Red and a head wider and almost as ugly. His mirror took a beating every morning, but that didn't seem to bother him as it did Red. He had a wife, a Chinese immigrant from Taiwan who wasn't disturbed by his lack of beauty. All Caucasian males looked the same to her.

Bleek squeezed Red's shoulders and said, "Hang in there, pal!"

"Stiff upper lip, old chap!" Ringo jeered as he and Red walked away. "That honey-voiced son of a bitch likes you so much because compared to him you're a wart hog's hind end and he's the peacock's."

Red didn't say anything. They had to stand to one side then while the attendants carried Ernie by

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under a sheet and on a stretcher. Blood was spreading out through it like it was looking for a new home.

"I think I'll quit," Ringo said. "Hell, we ain't even getting combat pay!"

Red didn't say much the next two hours except to answer questions from a squad of detectives. It was evident they thought he and Ringo were guilty, but that didn't bother him. In their books, everybody was guilty, and that included the judges. By the time they'd finished the session, they were even looking suspiciously at each other. The session didn't last very long, though. The cops' red faces quickly got green, and they staggered out one by one. Red finally figured that it was because he and Ringo had brought up a lot of the sewer with them.

That's strange, he thought. They don't mind the moral atmosphere in here. In fact, most of them seem to get fat on it. Then he remembered the sewer rats and how fat they were.

3.

It was still afternoon when they got out. The light was the same as everyday in Golden Gate City on a cloudless day. The brightness had the harshness of reality but made the buildings and the people look unreal. It was as if the emerald city of Oz had been whitewashed. By an apprentice painter. Or maybe by Tom Sawyer's friends.

Ringo lit a cigarette. Ringo was short and very round in head and body and legs. This, with his shiny black skin, made him look like an anarchist's bomb that was ready to go off. The cigarette was the fuse.

"Let's get something to eat," Ringo said.

"My God, after seeing Ernie!" Red said. He wanted only to go to his room, which really wasn't anything to go to. But it was better than going any place else. He'd get into the shower, with his overalls and boots still on, and wash off his clothes. Then he'd wash himself. Then he'd open a cold can of beer — the beer would be cold, too — and he'd turn the heat on very low in his oven and put the wet clothes in the oven but leave its door open. The smell of cleanliness would spread through his one room and bath. It would be like forgiveness from a priest after a long, hard confession. Repentance played no part in it, though. He knew all along that he meant to sin again, to go down into the sewers the next day. The slough of despond, he thought. Despondency was a sin, but in the tunnels its peculiar odor was overridden by all the others. Moreover, up here he got even more despondent because he had to take so much crap from everybody. He took it down there, too, but down

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there it was impersonal.

Then, he'd be padding around naked, passing the mirror a dozen times and avoiding looking in it. When he forgot and did look into it, he'd give it the finger. It gave him the finger back, but it never did it first. It tried, but Red was the fastest finger in the West.

By the time he'd turned the old TV set on, he'd hear a banging at the door. That'd be old Mrs. Nilssen, his widowed landlady. Mrs. Nilssen would cry out in her seventy-year voice that she wanted to talk to him. Actually, she was a drunk who wanted a drink. After a few, she'd want to lay him. Mrs. Nilssen, poor old soul, was desperate, and she figured that as ugly as he was he'd be grateful to have even her. A couple of times she'd been almost right. But he didn't want any of her desperation. He could just barely handle his own.

After he'd yelled at her to go away enough times, she'd go. Then he'd sit down at the desk he'd bought at the Goodwill and with another beer by his elbow compose his poetry. He'd look out the window from five stories up on the hill and see other windows looking up or down at him. Somewhere beyond them was the bay and the great bridge over which Jack London and Ambrose Bierce and Mark Twain and George Sterling had once ridden in carriages. He knew that the bridge hadn't been built in their day, but it was nice to think of them rolling across it. And if the bridge had been built then, they would have crossed on it.

He had his own bridge to cross. This was finishing the poem which he had titled *The Queen of Darkness.* He'd started it twenty years ago when he was twenty-five. He'd written it on yellow second sheets and envelopes and grocery sacks and once, out of paper and funds, on the dust on his desk. The dust had inspired him; it'd kindled the greatest lines he'd ever written. He got so excited he went out and got drunk, and when he got back from work the next day, he'd rushed to the desk to read them because he couldn't remember them. They weren't there. Wouldn't you know it, old Mrs. Nilssen had cleaned his room. This was the first and last time; the cleaning was only an excuse to look for the bottle that she was sure he'd hidden. She thought everybody had a hidden bottle.

He'd never been able to reconstruct the lines, and so he'd lost his chance to get his start as a major poet. Those lines would've launched him; it wouldn't be anything but *Excelsior* from then on. At least, it was nice to believe so.

Now, after a couple of millions of lines, Red had to admit that he couldn't even play in the minor leagues of poetry. His stuff stank,

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just as the sewers stank. Actually, it was the sewers that had ruined his poetry, though in the beginning they were his inspiration. He was going to write something as good as, maybe better than, Thompson's *City of Dreadful Night.* Maybe as good as Keats' *La Belle Dame Sans Merci.* Then, ugly or not, he'd be invited to the colleges and the salons to read his poems, and the women would fall over him. But, no, his candle had gone out in the darkness and the damp and the stink. That white wavering beauty, the muse that he had imagined moving toward him, then away, beckoning him on into distant tunnels, there to show him love and death, had died. Like a minstrel show at a Black Muslim meeting.

Still, there were times when he thought he saw her dimly, a flicker, at the far corner of the dark canal.

4.

"What the hell you thinking of, man?" Ringo said.

"I can't eat now. Let's have a few drinks first."

This was fine with Ringo. They walked through the crowd, which gave them plenty of room, to The Tanglefoot Tango Tavern. This was half-full of winos and pushers, and the other half was narks and a drunken preacher from the Neo-Sufi Church down the street. The Reverend Hadji Fawkes saluted them as they came in. "Is there a God in the sewers? Does he walk in the coolth of the smell?"

"Not since last Tuesday, Rev.," Ringo said and pushed Red on ahead. Red wanted to talk; a religion that promoted intoxication as The Way was interesting. So did the other customers, as long as Fawkes bought drinks for them. But Ringo wasn't having any of a white man's faith, free booze or not.

They sat down near the jukebox, which was playing *Show Me the Way To Go Home,* one of the church's official hymns. They ordered a pitcher of beer apiece and a couple of hamburgers for Ringo. Seeing Red's expression, Ringo told the waitress, "Take it easy on the catsup."

"How's the poetry going?" Ringo said, though he could care less.

"I'm about to give up and write a book. One on the myths and legends of the sewer system of Golden Gate City."

"Man, that's spooky," Ringo said. "You don't believe any of that shit, do you?"

"The Phantom of the Sewers? Why not? He could be just some wino that went ape and decided to imitate Lon Chaney. There are lots of places he could hole up, and anyway he doesn't have to spend all his time haunting the tunnels. He

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could live part of the time upstairs, maybe he"s right here now, standing at the bar, drinking, laughing at us."

Ringo looked quickly at the customers at the bar and said, "Naw. Not them."

"Has the Phantom ever done anything to hurt anybody, besides scare them half to death? And with what? A Halloween skull mask and a black robe? I don't think someone threw acid in his face and it ate his face off so the skull shows. That's right out of the old movie, Ringo."

"I seen him once, anyway," Ringo said. "He was poling a long shallow boat along, standing up in it, his robes fluttering in the wind, he was near one of the big fans, and his eyes was big and white, and his face was half gone. That was scary enough but what really made me take off was his passenger. It looked like a heap of ... something, a heap that was pulsing like a toad. It had one round eye, no lid, which was staring at me."

"I thought you said you didn't believe in that crap," Red McCune said.

"What I say and what I believe ain't always the same thing."

"Lots of people are that way," Red said. "It sounds like the Phantom made friends with the Terrible Turdothere," he added. He grinned, but the grin was only to show that he wasn't serious. If Ringo thought he was serious, he'd never go down into the sewers again. There'd go his job and his seniority and his pension and his World War II souvenirs. There'd go his satisfaction and contentment, too, because Ringo liked his job. No matter what he said about it, he liked it.

Every bat to his own belfry.

"I don't know," Ringo said slowly. "I ain't seen the Phantom since, and nobody else has either as far as I could find out. Do you suppose that the Phantom was hypnotized by the Turdothere and it had commanded him to take it to its secret lair where it could eat the Phantom?"

They were silent for a while as they watched the horror films on the picture tubes of their minds. These were the latest in a long line: *Frankenstein Battles the Wolf Man, Dracula Squares Off at the Creature from the Black Lagoon, The Golem Meets the Giant Spirochete, Abbott and Costello Versus the Daughter of Mr. Hyde and the Hyena Woman.* When the monsters got tired of eating people, they ate each other.

As background music, the jukebox, now off the religious kick, was bellowing country music: *I Was with You Last Night, Honey, and Now I Got Me Two Acres.* An old man, screaming that he was the

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long-lost heir to the Rockefeller fortune, was being carried out the back door into the alley. Another old man was coughing up blood under a table. His cronies were betting drinks, from his bottle, for or against his ever taking another drink.

The myth of the Turdothere went like this. It wasn't a Mad Scientist that created the Turdothere. In the old days it would have been, but people didn't believe in a Mad Scientist any more. The faith in their existence was gone. They were as extinct as Zeus or Odin or maybe even God.

It was The Mad TV Writer that was the new menace. The name was Victor Scheissmiller, a man who had really lived. Everybody had seen his picture in the newspapers and magazines and read about him in them. He wasn't something made up.

It was true that he had gone mad, his mind off-course like Wrong Way Corrigan's airplane. After eighteen years of writing contest shows, children's shows, westerns, cops-and-robbers, science-fiction series, and soap operas, he blew the tube on his mental set. There wasn't any warranty, and he didn't try to trade in the old mind. He disappeared one day, last seen climbing down a manhole. The note he left behind said he was going to create a monster, the Turdothere, and release it on the world. After it ate up all the sewer workers, it would emerge from a storm sewer and devour the whole population while they sat hypnotized before their TV's.

The surface people thought it was a big joke. The tunnel people laughed about it when they were above. But when they were below, they did a lot of looking over their shoulders.

Nobody had seen Victor Scheissmiller in the sewers, but some had seen the heaving stinking mass of the Turdothere with its one glass eye — Scheissmiller's own, some said. Some workers said that it was the Turdothere that had killed their buddies and cut off the head, legs, and arms. But those who'd seen the thing said it had no teeth. It must gum its victims to death, or maybe it stuck a tentacle of crap down their throats and choked them. Then it wrapped itself around them and dissolved them in its juices.

How did it keep alive when only a few people had disappeared in the sewers? Easy. It ate rats, too. And it was probably a cannibal; it ate crap, too.

It grew even larger then, and it could become a colossus, since there was no end of this kind of food, unless the plumbers went on strike. Its main body, though, was supposed to be in a sort of skeleton,

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old bones put together by Scheissmiller. There were nerves of thread and catgut and a condom swelling and shrinking like a heart, pumping muscatel from a bottel for its blood, a jar of vaginal jelly for a liver, cigar butts embedded in the body drawing oxygen through it. And so on.

Others said this wasn't correct. The thing was a 300-pound mass of nothing but living crap, no bones or bottles in it, and it flowed along and changed shape like *The Brobdingnagian Bacillus That Desired Raquel Welch.* (Later retitled *I Bugged the Body Beautiful.*)

Everybody agreed, though, that it had one glass eye which it used to spot its victims.

"Mostly it's made of dead human hopes," Red said.

"What?" Ringo said.

"Well, I'll be damned," Red added. "Look who's here!"

Ringo jumped up with a scream, upsetting a pitcher of beer, and he whirled around, crying, "Oh, no! It's not here!"

"So you don't believe?" Red said, sneering. "No, Ringo, it isn't the Turdothere. It's Inspector Bleek himself."

"What's he doing here?" Ringo said. He sat down and tried to hide his shaking by gripping Red's pitcher with two hands and pouring out a glass of beer. He didn't make it.

Bleek drew up a chair and thrust his ugly face across the table as close as he could get it to Red's face. "I just got the coroner's report from the cops," he said. "Ernie was raped, just like those other two boys."

Ringo ordered two more pitchers. Red was silent for a while, then he said, "Was it before or after they were killed?"

"Before," Bleek said.

"That tears it," Ringo said. "I'm quitting. If I'm gonna be butchered by a sexual pervert, I'm gonna do it up in the sunshine."

"With all the security you got?" Bleek said. "I was afraid you two guys were thinking of quitting, which is why I am here. Hang on, old buddies. Tomorrow the police are going to conduct a massive manhunt through the entire sewer system. They need guides, so you two can help, if you want to."

He put his arm around Red and squeezed his shoulder.

"The Public Works Department expects every man to do his duty. Besides, there'll be camera crews down there tomorrow. You might get to see yourself on TV."

How could anybody resist that?"

5.

The hunt took four days, and it turned out just like Red McCune expected it to. Lights blazed, men

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yelled, bloodhounds bayed. The darkness moved in after the lights moved on, the men got hoarse and fell silent, the hounds smelled nothing but sewer gas. The hounds didn't know what they were looking for, anyway. Nobody had a glove from the Phantom to let them sniff or a dropping from a thing that was all droppings. And the Sewer Slayer, as the papers and TV called him, was out for lunch. Whoever and whatever he was, he was no idiot.

"See?" Red told Ringo.

"There's plenty of places to hide, secret exits, alcoves and old tunnels that've been bricked off, and stuff like that," Ringo answered. "Anyway, how do we know he wasn't hiding under the water? The Phantom of the Opera walked underwater while he breathed through a tube."

What they did find was a Pekingese dog that'd been tortured to death and three human fetuses, all looking like Martians that had crash-landed. The usual.

They also found the rats, or maybe it was the other way around. This was when the hunters started having a good time. After trudging for miles through dark wet stinking places, getting tired and half-nauseated and bored, and in a killing mood, they had something to kill.

The rats had been running for hours ahead of them, and now there was a wagon train of them, about four hundred furry gray pioneers cornered by the Indians. Most of them had swum through canals during their flight and so looked like dust mops that had been rained on. Their eyes shone red in the beams, like little traffic lights. STOP they said, and the men did halt for a minute while they looked the squealing heaving mass over. A flashlight caught a blur that leaped down from a ledge at the far end of the chamber. It was three times as big as the others, and its one eye seemed to have its own glow. It was not gray but white above and black below.

"That must be their leader," one of the cops said. "Lord I'm glad they're not all that big!"

The shooting and the clubbing started then. The .38's and the .45's and the shotguns boomed, deafening everybody in a few seconds. The rats blew up as if they were little mines. Most of them ran back and forth instead of making a run for it through the humans. They'd heard that a cornered rat always fights, and they believed it. The skeptics among them dashed through the hunters, biting a few hands and legs. Most of them were smashed with saps or flashlights but a few got away.

Ringo jumped in with the others, swinging a Samurai sword from his collection. "Banzai!" he'd

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cry, and when a rat leaped at him and he cut off its head in midair, "Ah, so!".

Beyond him Inspector Bleek, a big grin on his face like a Halloween pumpkin's, fired a six-shooter into the horde. It was a heirloom from his great-grandfather, who had conquered the West with it. Its barrel was long enough and wide enough to make an elephant proctologist happy. It flashed out .44 caliber bullets which mowed the rats down like they were grandfather's Indians.

In his other hand he held a big Bowie knife. Red wondered if he meant to do some scalping when the last stand was over. Red crouched down against the wall. He wasn't afraid of the rats but he didn't enjoy killing them either. He wanted to hang back mostly because he knew the bullets would start ricocheting. Sure enough, one screamed by, just like in a Western, and another followed it, and then some cop yelled that the rats were firing back. Later it turned out he'd been stunned by a bullet which just touched his forehead, and in his stupor he thought sure the rats had got hold of some guns.

The men started ducking but they kept on shooting. After a while, a man was hit in the leg, and the hunters started to come to their senses. The explosions died like the last of popcorn in the pan, the echoes feebled away, and there was silence except for the running waters behind them and the faraway baying of the hounds. Their owner wasn't risking his valuable property around anything so unreliable as rats.

The blood ran down the slanting apron of concrete to the channel for a minute. Then it stopped, like an oil well gone dry, go home, boys, I'm out of dinosaurs.

The only survivor was a big old rat, the Custer of the 7th Underground Cavalry. He climbed over and slid down body after body, dragging his hind legs, which were missing their feet, his goal the waters.

"He's sure got slanty eyes," Ringo said, and he leaped, shouting, "Banzai!" and his sword cut off the rat's head.

"God damn it!" Bleek said. "I wanted to do that!"

"I did that because I admired the son of a bitch," Ringo said. "He's got guts. He deserved an honorable death."

"You're crazy," Bleek said. He looked around, waving his Bowie as if it were a baton and the orchestra had gone on strike.

"Hey!" a cop said. "Look at that!"

In a corner was a mass of bodies and pieces of bodies. They'd been hosed against the wall and piled up

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by a stream of bullets. Everything in it seemed to have been killed three times at least. But it was stirring and then it was quaking, and cracks appeared, and suddenly the giant rat they'd glimpsed when the massacre began erupted. Only it wasn't a rat. It was a cat, snarling, his one eye as bright as a hotrodder's exhaust, his back curved as if he was a bow about to shoot himself at them. Despite the blood that streaked him, his coloring, white above and black below, showed through.

"Why, that's Old Half-Moon!" Red said.

"Who the hell's Half-Moon?" Bleek said.

Red didn't say anything about his being a legend of the sewers. He said, "He's been around a couple of years at least. When I first saw him, he was just an old alley cat. But he started getting big because rats make good eating. Look at him! He's been through a hundred fights above and two hundred below! One eye gone and both ears chewed apart. But he's a terror among the rats. I saw him take on ten one time and kill them all."

"Yeah?" Bleek said. He took a few steps toward Old Half-Moon. The cat crouched as if to spring. Bleek admonished him with his knife but he stopped.

"I think he's become pals with the rats," he said. "He's their leader. After all, you are what you eat, and he eats nothing but rats, so he must be half rat."

"You're what you breathe, too," Red said. "That makes us sewer workers half crap."

"That man's crazy," Ringo muttered.

"He got caught when they came swarming out," Red said. "He had to run ahead of them. Hell, even he wouldn't tackle that many rats."

"I don't want him jumping out of the dark and scaring me," Bleek said. He edged toward the cat, which looked as if it were going to erupt again. He was a Vesuvius of a cat, and his Pompeii would be Inspector Bleek.

"He don't pay any attention to us workers," Red said. "Hell, he and I've passed each other a dozen times; we just nod and go our own ways. He's a valuable animal; he kills more rats than a dozen poisoners. And he doesn't ask for overtime either."

"We could take him in," a cop said. Red thought he saw him reaching for his handcuffs but decided it was his imagination.

"Let him go," Red said.

"I'm your boss!"

"If you kill that cat, I quit."

Bleek scowled, and then, after a struggle, he put his knife in its sheath under his jacket. The smile came slowly, as if some little man inside him was working away at the

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ratchets connected to the corners of his lips. Finally, the big Halloween-pumpkin grin encased in plastic, he put his arm around Red.

"You love that cat, don't you?"

"He's like me, ugly and better off down here in the darkness."

Bleek laughed and squeezed Red's shoulder.

"You ain't ugly, man! You're beautiful!"

"I got a mirror."

Bleek laughed and let loose of Red's shoulder and slapped him on the ass. The cat darted by them, running as if he were glad to see the last of them. He'd had enough of rats for a long time, too.

6.

The order came down from the Commissioner of Public Works that no sewer worker was ever to be alone while working. They must always have a buddy in sight. Red and Ringo observed this rule, if not religiously at least devoutly. But as two weeks passed, they occasionally found themselves alone. Old habits, unlike old clothes, don't wear out easily. However, as soon as one became aware that the other had gone on ahead around a curve of a tunnel or had dropped back, one started calling and didn't quit until he'd seen the other. During this time, Red had nightmares. It was always the rats. He'd see them leaping around, and then, while he stood unable to run away, they'd scurry toward him, and after a while he'd feel one run up his leg. It would stop just below his buttocks and start sniffing and he knew what it was going to do and he tightened up but those chisel teeth were going to gnaw and gnaw.

He always woke then with the rats gone, but the horror took time to melt, like a suppository that'd just come from the refrigerator.

"Nibble, nibble, nibble," he said to Bleek. "A man doesn't have to die by big bites."

"Dreams can't kill you."

"They've killed more people than automobiles ever did. Napoleon and Hitler were dreamers. Come to think of it, it was dreamers that invented the automobile."

"Who invented dreams?" Bleek said.

That surprised Red, and he forgot what he was going to say next. Bleek seemed like a hail-fellow-well-met guy, smart enough for his job but no bargain in the intellect shop. Yet, every once in a while, he came out with a remark like this. There were a few trout among his mental carp.

Bleek looked at his wristwatch. Red said, "Yes, I kow. We got to get going."

Ringo had started down the manhole. While waiting for him, Red looked around. The sky was, or seemed to be, the deepest blue he'd

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ever seen. The tall buildings along this street were like mountains themselves, banking the street, keeping it in shady trust. The manhole, however, was in a spot where the sunshine ran between two buildings, like Indians coming through a pass, Red thought. Or the Golden Horde invading the land of shadows. The patina of unreality that raw sunshine always laid on Golden Gate City was the thickest he'd ever seen. The shadows fought it, battling to keep their hold on reality, but they were retreating.

Bleek was standing near him, obviously trying to think of something to say before he got in his car and drove off. A car passed by with a young couple in it, and the girl, a lovely creature, pointed at Red and said something to the driver, a handsome fellow. He took a quick look at Red and then at Bleek, and his lips formed words. "Oh, my God!"

"Doubled in ugliness," the girl's lips shaped.

Red gave her the finger. The girl, her head turned to look behind her, was startled at first, but she laughed and turned to the boy and said something. Red thought for a minute that the boy might back up the car and come storming out, but after slowing down, the car speeded up. The two had thrown their heads back as if they were laughing.

Red shrugged. He'd seen this reaction many times before. People were always shocked when they uncovered the conspiracy of his genes to overthrow the human face. Then they laughed.

He started down the ladder below the manhole. Bleek said, "How's your poem coming?"

Red wondered why he was asking him that, but he answered, "I've given up on *The Queen of Darkness*. No, that's wrong. She's given up on me. Anyway, she was never serious. All she ever did was flirt with me. She isn't going to kiss me, like she does real poets."

"You're a little strange," Bleek said. "But then I got a lot of strange ones among my boys. Sewer work seems to attrack them, but of course this *is* California. So you ain't going to write poetry any more?"

"I've had it," Red said. "All I've wanted for the past two years is to write four perfect lines. To hell with epics, especially epics about sewers. All I wanted was four lines that would make me remembered forever, and I'd have settled for two. Two lines to blaze in the eyes of the world so it wouldn't see the face of the man behind them. That wasn't much to ask, but it was too much. She's kissed me off for good. She doesn't come in my dreams any more. It's just the rats that come now."

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Bleek looked distressed. However, he often looked that way. The planes of his face naturally formed themselves into a roadmap of grief.

"You saying this is the end of the line for you?"

"As a poet, yes. And since I'm half poet, though a bad one, only half a man is going to survive."

Bleek didn't seem to know what to say. Red said, "See you," and he climbed on down the ladder. He and Ringo picked up their tools and lunchbuckets and walked toward their work. Somewhere ahead of them something had clogged up the stream, and they had to find it and remove it.

They passed through areas where permanent lights blazed overhead and then through dark places where the only light was their headlamps. Like a chess board, Red thought, where the only players were pawns.

Their lamps beamed on a big pile of something indeterminable. The mass was like a dam, at least a foot higher than the water backing up behind it.

Ringo, a few feet ahead of Red, stopped on the walkway and looked down at the pile. Red started to say something, and then Ringo screamed.

The mass had come alive. It was heaving up from the channel, and two pseudopods had encircled Ringo's feet and waist.

Red was paralyzed. The tunnel had become a cannon barrel down which unreality was shooting.

Ringo fought the tentacles, tearing off big pieces of soft brown stuff. Bones wired together at the joints fell out of the stuff that struck the concrete walkway, but other pseudopods grew out of the mass and seized Ringo around the throat and between his legs. They extended, slid around and around Ringo while Red stared. His beam lit up Ringo's open mouth, the white teeth, the whites of the eyes. It also reflected on the single bulging eye on top of a bump on the side near Ringo.

Suddenly, Ringo's jaw dropped, and his eyes started to glaze like the monster's eye. Either he had fainted or he had had a heart attack. Whichever it was, he had fallen onto the mass, a little from the eye, and he was sinking face down into it.

Red wanted to run away, but he couldn't leave Ringo to be drawn into that sickening mass. Suddenly, as if a switch had been slammed shut inside him, he leaped forward. At the edge of the walkway he leaned down and grabbed Ringo's left ankle. A tentacle, soft, slimy, stinking, came up over the edge of the concrete and coiled around his own leg. He screamed but he did not let loose of the ankle. Ringo was being pulled out slowly, and Red

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knew that if he could hang on to him, he could probably get him away. He had to free him soon because Ringo, if he wasn't dead, was going to suffocate in a short time.

Before he could drop the ankle and get away, he was up to his waist in the mass. It had oozed up onto the walkway, enfolded him, and was sucking him into it.

The glass eye was in front of his face; it was on the end of a pod, swaying back and forth before him.

Red, still screaming, took off his helmet and batted at the eye. It struck it, tore it loose, and then he was in darkness. The helmet had been snatched away and was sinking into the vast body. For a second the light glowed redly inside and then was gone.

Red forgot about Ringo. He thrashed and struck out and suddenly he was free. Sobbing, he crawled away until he came against the wall. He didn't know which way was upstream, but he hoped he was going in the right direction. The thing couldn't make much headway against the waters. It had pulled part of its body away from the channel to get up on the walkway, and the waters had come rushing down the opened way. They made a strong current just now, one against which the thing surely could not swim very swiftly.

Also, with its eye gone, it was as blind as he. Could it hear? Smell?

Maybe I've flipped, Red thought. That thing can't exist. I must be in delirium, imagining it. Maybe I'm really in a straitjacket someplace. I hope they can give me something, a miracle drug, a shock treatment, to get me out of here. What if I were locked in this nightmare forever?

He heard a shout behind him, a human voice. He quit crawling and turned around. The beam of a headlamp shone about fifty yards from him. He couldn't see the figure under it, but it must be about six feet two or three inches high. Anyboy he knew?

The beam danced around, lit on him once, then went back to point up and down the stream. The water level had gone down though it was still higher than it should be. The thing had gone with the current, Ringo inside it.

The beam left the channel and played on the walkway as the man walked toward him. Red sat down with his back against the wall, unable to hear the approaching footsteps because of his loud breathing and his heart booming in his eardrums. The man stopped just before him, the beam on his helmet glaring into Red's eyes so he couldn't see the face beneath.

"Listen," Red said. Something struck the top of his head, and when he awoke the light was out. He had a sharp pain in his head,

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but he had no time to think about that. His clothes had been removed, and he was on his back, and his hands were under him and taped together at the wrists. His ankles were also taped.

Red groaned and said, "What are you doing? Who is it?

There was a sound as of a suddenly sucked-in breath.

"For God's sake," Red said. "Let me loose. Don't you know what happened? Ringo was killed. It's true, so help me God, he was swallowed by a thing you wouldn't believe. It's waiting out there. A man alone won't get by him. Together we might make it."

He jumped as a hand touched his ankle above the tapes. He trembled as the hand began moving up his leg. He jumped again when something cold and hard touched the other leg for a moment.

"Who are you?" he yelled. "Who are you?"

He heard only a heavy breathing. The hand and the knife had stopped, but now they were sliding upward along his flesh.

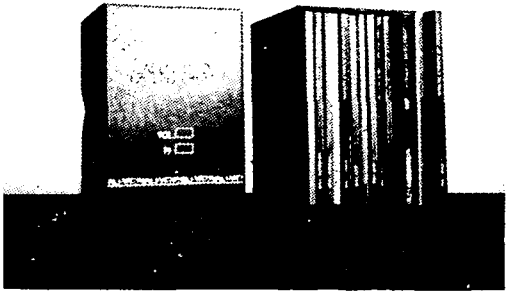
"Who are you?"

The hand and the knife stopped. A voice, thick as honey, said, "I'm not worried about the thing. It's my buddy."

"Bleek?"

"Up there. Down here it's the queen of darkness, pal."

"Welcome," Red said, but he didn't mean it.



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The mission of the Order of Assassins was to kill a Centurian god who perhaps did not exist . . .

Achilles Heel

by HERBIE BRENNAN

Prinz was ushered into the presence of God and found him much like any other Centurian, which is to say he was humanoid, slender and six-fingered. He dressed, as most Centurians dressed, in a sweeping, high-winged cloak and looked, as most Centurians looked, vaguely sinister. From certain viewpoints, he was the leader of the most savage, despicable, dangerous race in the universe.

There were two guards behind Prinz at the door, more ceremonial than functional. The real danger was the Praetorian Guard flanking the throne. They had already proved themselves very fast and very deadly. Prinz noted they did not hold their original positions, but moved as the Kan Nor moved. Should a god need bodyguards? If one argued that he did, then it followed he should have the finest available. The Kan Nor, god-king of Centuria, had the very finest available.

"You are welcome," he said to Prinz.

"I am honored," Prinz replied formally. He bowed.

As he bowed, he imprinted the geography of the room on his mind. There had been some minor changes since the last human visit — an incense burner forward of the throne, an extension to the wall seat reserved for waiting supplicants — but overall it was exactly as reported, the sort of cross between temple and court usually found in cultures which deified their leaders.

The Visier was approaching to accept the gift Prinz bore, a bolt of real silk almost seventeen feet long. The examination of the gift had taken two full days, ensuring it concealed nothing, bore no lethal radiations, carried no deadly virus. Prinz himself had undergone an even more thorough examination, so thorough indeed that it would

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have unearthed the Order's more usual weapons. In this case, of course, it revealed nothing, for Prinz was unarmed.

"I bear this small gift to the Kan Nor as a token of esteem from his friend the Emperor of New Asia," Prinz lied. His credentials, oddly enough, were genuine, although the Emperor would have been surprised to know it. The ponderous burocracy of New Asia made an operation of this type possible, at least once. Should Prinz fail like the others, the Order would naturally find some fresh approach.

"I accept the gift gladly on behalf of the Kan Nor," the Visier intoned. There was a rumor he was more than six hundred years old, which was ancient even for a Centurian. To Prinz he looked little different from the rest. Centurian age nuances were difficult even for the most observant human.

It was necessary for Prinz to come within six feet of the Kan Nor. Any greater distance would permit the Praetorians to act; and though his training equipped him to deal with any of them, he had no illusions about tackling them all.

"The Emperor has news of grave import," Prinz said. "It is my duty to impart it personally to the Kan Nor."

"We await your words," the Visier said easily. He turned to hand the bolt of silk to a retainer, one of the small neuters who made up the bulk of the Centurian population.

"The instruction of the Emperor is that my words are for the Kan Nor only," Prinz said. It was an ageless ploy, chosen for its basic simplicity. The Order reasoning was that if Centurians shared any characteristic with the human race, it was the characteristic of curiosity. On his passage upwards through the Centurian burocracy, he had resisted strenuous efforts to persuade him to reveal his message in advance.

"The Kan Nor is with us," the Visier said. "He will hear."

"And so will others," Prinz said. He waited, feet planted in a posture denoting firmness. There were several similarities to a Medieval court on Earth, but he had been warned not to extend the parallels too far. The Order was, after all, dealing with the product of an insect evolution. It was vital to take nothing for granted.

"They are Centurians," the Visier said simply, as if that answered the objection.

Prinz smiled thinly. "But my Emperor is not. He wishes the message delivered in the utmost privacy." There was no message. If the ploy did not work, Prinz would be faced with some tricky explanations. If it did work, he would soon be dead.

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"It is not possible to meet with the Kan Nor except in the presence of his Faithful," the Visier said.

Prinz took a deep breath. "Then it is not possible for me to deliver my message." Less than three minutes had elapsed since he was ushered in and already he had reached the pivot of the operation. This was the moment, according to Order psychologists, on which all depended. There was, of course, no question of seeing the Kan Nor alone. But if the estimates of Centurian psychology were correct....

"Perhaps we should not stand on ceremony," the Kan Nor said in that deep, rich voice which seemed the mark of so many hereditary leaders. He was walking towards Prinz, flanked by his guards. "Our friend does not understand the customs of—" He crossed the invisible line and Prinz exploded into action, his mind and body in perfect, deadly harmony. He had no need of weapons since he was himself a weapon, the culmination point of a Terrestrial tradition so ancient it encompassed the prehistoric legend of Hassassans, the Samurai, the Kamakazi, the Preng Dans of New Holland, the Weirdlings of Passanoria. The Visier was slammed aside so violently that his skull cracked on a pillar and he folded like a broken toy. In the split second, the Praetorians began to move and one actually managed to insinuate himself partially between Prinz and the Kan Nor. He too died, in agony, as a questing finger reached the special nerve point on his throat.

And then Prinz reached the god-king himself in an animal flurry of icy frenzy, his hardened hands and feet striking in a predetermined pattern that shattered bones, ripped veins and savaged nerves, leaving behind only a corpse, a hollow shell that had once housed a living being.

Prinz withdrew, his mind blank with shock. The Kan Nor was still standing, his body untouched, his breathing easy, his face impassive. He could not have survived the attack, yet survive it he had. He reached out a gentle hand to Prinz and Prinz sank into darkness.

Two

The seventh unsuccessful attempt to reach a victim required a Cowled Meeting in Mourning of the Star Chamber. It was the first such meeting in two hundred and eighteen years.

"Have we fresh intelligence from Centuria?" Madame T'su asked.

"None of any great relevance," Stanislav Hampton told her. His massive shoulders shrugged beneath the robes. "No new security precautions have been taken."

"Apparently none are needed.

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They have already stopped seven of our best men."

Hampton turned his great head towards her. "To be accurate, they have stopped three. The remaining four achieved an audience with the Kan Nor."

"But failed to kill him."

"Indeed," Hampton nodded.

"With Prinz there could be no question of weapons failure," Madame T'su murmured, half to herself.

"Only personal failure," Ling said.

"Not according to the Centurians themselves," Hampton put in. "They reported an attack on the Kan Nor."

"If Prinz was able to attack, the Kan Nor would be dead," Cawley said.

"In such reports, the Centurians have never been known to lie," Hampton told him.

Madame T'su shrugged. "Who knows how insects think? Perhaps this is one report which is false, the only report which is false. I find it difficult to believe any Centurian could have survived an attack by Prinz: he is —" She corrected herself. "— He was exceptional."

"We should consider the probability that the Kan Nor is a mutant," Ling said. "This would throw fresh factors into our calculations."

"The possibility has been computed," the Abbot said, speaking for the first time. "The only relevant factor would be a psionic mutation and the operation involving Berber ruled that out."

"Some form of force field protection?"

The Abbot shook his head. "Well beyond Centurian technology at its present level."

"The insects do not have high-range space travel," Madame T'su said. "They are confined to their system."

"So far," Hampton murmured.

"A highly favorable physical mutation could have given him an edge on Prinz," Ling insisted.

"Prinz could claw through brick," said Madame T'su. "There is only one Order assassin more deadly."

"Muller," Hampton nodded.

To Ling, the Abbot said, "A physical mutation so radical would require observable changes in Centurian body structure. None have been reported."

"All living beings may be killed," Cawley said. "It is a principle of our Order."

They sat in silent meditation, five robed figures stationed at five points on an inlaid star.

Madame T'su said formally, "It is my proposal that we activate Muller."

Ling said, "Muller is our best, but only a little better than Prinz. It

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is my opinion that the slight difference will not lead to a successful mission."

"Have you a proposal?" the Abbot asked.

"No," Ling said.

The massive Stanislav Hampton, who did not look subtle, said, "It is my proposal that we take a more subtle approach."

Cawley said, "It is my proposal that we wait one year and seven months before our next attempt."

"You feel our previous attempts were not closely enough synchronized with the universal harmony?" the Abbot asked.

"Yes," Cawley said.

There was no further discussion. They deliberated on the alternative proposals.

Three

The overall cultural pattern of Centuria was drab to human eyes. Except, that is, for a brief three yearly cycle when the alaya plants flowered and the neuter Centurians took on a temporary sexuality. Once alaya gathering was complete, a planetary festival was held, culminating in a temple ceremony of thanksgiving to the Kan Nor.

The procession was packed with dignitaries from the five closest terraform planets, along with a spattering of aliens from Capra, Selgun and Domatara. Muller walked on the edge of a tight little group about a hundred yards or so from the Kan Nor's party. Even to his practiced eye, there was little evidence of security. But even with so long an interval since the last assassination attempt, he knew precautions had been taken all the same. The knowledge did not worry him.

He took up his appointed place in the temple, within striking distance of the dais. There he waited, alert and calm, while the grinding boredom of the ceremonies sent his human companions into torpor.

He made his move with the precision of a machine as the Kan Nor rose to conclude the ceremony. The timing had been suggested by Order psychologists, who had observed the hypnotic affect of religious ceremonies on Centurians and argued that the Praetorian reflexes would be slowed.

It seemed the prediction was correct. Muller was almost upon the Kan Nor when he was cut in half by a laser beam weilded by the Semurian Ambassador, an elderly man who, to all outside appearances, should not have had the speed to cope with such an emergency.

Four

"My people thank you," the Kan Nor said. "A service to god is a service to the race."

Herman Belgrave, the Semur-

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ian Ambassador, bowed politely. "It was nothing."

"It was everything. You prevented sacrilege. Your degree of alertness was commendable."

Belgrave shrugged. "I had been thinking of the previous attempts on your life. It perhaps prepared me for the emergency." He had, he knew, committed an almost unforgivable political gaffe, for the laser he had used was a ceremonial weapon, supposedly incapable of firing. On Semuria, of course, every weapon, ceremonial or otherwise, was kept in flawless working order; but the Semurian Government made little effort to broadcast this fact, and an Ambassador's diplomatic immunity rendered him immune to all but the most cursory security. Fortunately the Centurians were now turning a blind eye in deference to his action. All the same, he felt his position delicate.

"And well it did," the Kan Nor said. He walked beyond the garden shrubs to a stone bench and sat. His guards positioned themselves behind and beside him. "Although it would have been fruitless for the assassin to have reached me."

"Of course," Belgrave murmured politely. The legend of the Kan Nor's invincibility was carefully nurtured on Centuria, where native Centurians saw no paradox in an immortal's need of guards.

"Nevertheless," the Kan Nor said, "for an alien to have laid hands on my person would have been sacrilege. A bad omen, you understand."

"Of course," Belgrave said again. Like any good diplomat, he was wondering how best to turn the incident to his own advantage. He thought about the Order of Assassins. With such an organization pledged to the Kan Nor's downfall, it was awesome that this creature had survived so long. Was it possible he could not be killed? The universe was large enough to house the most unlikely creatures, so that even an immortal was not entirely beyond question. Yet other Centurians, despite astonishing life cycles, still died eventually; and many died unnaturally in accident or battle. Was the Kan Nor really different? A being unique not only in his own culture but in the known universe? Or did he have some Achilles Heel? If so, would the Order of Assassins find it?

"On your world," the Kan Nor said, as if reading his thoughts, "on Semuria, does the Order of Assassins operate?"

Belgrave hesitated, then said, "Regrettably, yes." He smiled thinly. "There are some who claim the headquarters of the Order are located on Semuria, but I find that difficult to believe."

"Yet their headquarters must be somewhere. Perhaps they chose

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Semuria precisely because no one would expect it." The humanoid face was impassive, as if the Kan Nor was discussing a point of philosophy of no practical concern. "Is their motivation religious?"

"No one really knows," Belgrave said. "One suspects they kill for pay, like hired mercenaries. But so little is known about them that one could not rule out religious motivation. There was a sect on Earth once that killed to please their goddess."

The Kan Nor nodded, as if religious slaughter was the most natural thing in the world. "Perhaps that is their motivation in my case. I am, after all, a religious entity. They have now made seven attacks in all, spaced over five of our years — eighteen of yours. Three assassins did not actually reach my person; they were detected by members of my priesthood. Of the remaining four, one was killed by my guards."

Only one? It was generally assumed the guards had safeguarded their god on all the known occasions. Belgrave frowned. "And the other three?"

"Failed in their mission," the Kan Nor said unhelpfully.

Curiosity got the better of Belgrave's diplomatic instincts. "May I ask why?"

He expected a devious answer and received it. "They failed because nothing can kill an entity which is not truly alive," the Kan Nor said.

Five

"He does not exist?" asked Madame T'su politely. She was far too cultured to allow her bewilderment to show.

"So he claimed in our discussion."

"And you believed him?" Hampton asked.

"Once I understood what he meant," the Abbot said. He looked at them gravely. "We should have been more efficient to have studied Centurian dogma. It gives many clues to the reality of the situation. And, of course, the reality of the situation gives us the Kan Nor's Achilles Heel."

"Did he realize that?" Cawley asked.

"Possibly," the Abbot said. "He would not, of course, have considered that the knowledge might be used against him. Without Order training, certain actions are unthinkable."

Six

The warship was equipped like any other, except for two important modifications. One was the signal-absorbent field that flowed around its hull, leaving it inert under sensor probe. The other was the constitution of its single missile.

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The blue-green orb of Centuria filled most of the viewing screen. Watching it, Madame T'su said thoughtfully, "I almost regret the sacrifice of Muller. He was a superb instrument."

At the computer bank, Cawley activated the first stage of the missile programme. "The universe will be a better place without those insects," he murmured.

"Who would have thought," Ling mused, "they had the power to externalize their thought-forms."

"Not exactly that," the Abbot Belgrave said. "The process is unconscious."

"And apparently conditioned by their religious instinct," Madame T'su put in. She turned away from the screen.

"Indeed," the Abbot said. He frowned thoughtfully. "A curious phenomenon."

"Telepathic at root," said Ling.

"Without doubt," the Abbot said. "There would have to be telepathic pressure; otherwise no one but Centurians would see the hallucination."

"Hardly hallucination," Ling said.

Madame T'su, who was herself a psychologist, said, "I would prefer to say the externalization of an archetype in the collective unconscious of the Centurian race."

"He seemed perfectly real when I talked with him," the Abbot said.

"Archetypes are real enough at their own level. It's merely that their level is usually subjective and unconscious. The Kan Nor is quite independent of any Centurian." Madame T'su blinked slowly. "But not of all Centurians."

Of them all, Ling had been most intrigued by the Abbot's news

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about the Kan Nor. "It creates interesting questions about the nature of reality. Or at least about our perception of reality."

"Do you think so," Madame T'su said politely. "I should have thought the phenomenon perfectly comprehensible within our current psychiatric models. Those who see the Kan Nor are simply suffering from a shared hallucination, projected by the mass unconscious of Centurian minds. Since the form of the hallucination is archetypal, it has independent action — a type of life, personality and mentation. But it's primal characteristics are imposed by the belief patterns of the race that gave it birth."

"They believed it indestructible, and so it was," Ling said.

"And despite all appearances," the Abbot put in, "it has no existence apart from its race." He glanced at the changing digits flickering across the control panel. "If the human race died out with the exception of Madame T'su, her personal existence would not be affected by that fact." A muted buzzer sounded to show the missile was fully operational. "But when we exterminate the life forms of Centuria, the basis of the Kan Nor's existence will be obliterated. He will no longer be sustained by their unconscious belief. He will vanish as if he had never been."

"It would have been a smear on the name of the Order had we failed to find a way to kill him," Madame T'su remarked.

The Abbot smiled and pressed the switch which sent the missile out towards Centuria.

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Here is the second of three stories about the action around the bar in writers' heaven (the first was "Big Ernie, The Royal Russian and the Big Trapdoor" in the May issue).

Ring, The Brass Ring, The Russian And I

by BARRY N. MALZBERG

I am standing between two famous personalities in the bar of writer's heaven at the particular time when this instance commences and, considering the relatively late hour of the day here in our temperature-adjusted heaven and the heavy imbibing which all of us have done, am in reasonably good condition until the door bangs open and comes waltzing into the bar a personage I have not seen for several months' subjective time, this personage being the well-knownst Ring of the Thousand Faces, who only rarely but significantly emerges from the brothel to seek more attenuated pleasures. In what I have come to call my post-death period, my opening sentences have become even longer than is my wont but that is a natural tendency. We are all what we once were here in writer's heaven except that we are more of the same.

"I want a drink," Ring says loudly, moving to the open space at the far left. The new bartender — there is a rotating crew here, no one can take this indefinitely — makes twitching and inquiring gestures, and Ring adds, "What the hell do I care as long as it comes in large quantity and makes me shudder as it goes down?" The bartender shrugs, as do all bartenders in but the very best of fictions, and begins to set up Ring a large homewrecker, neat. "That is the story," Ring says, drawing his hat down over his eyes and turning towards me. "I recognize you," he says, "and I recognize this sinister midwestern type to your left, who was extremely overrated in all things, particularly his drinking capacity, but I do not recognize this strange, highly dignified individual to your right. He radiates refinement," Ring says and takes the tumbler of gin and knocks it down in one metallic swallow, "and if there is one thing I

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cannot stand, it is that, since refinement can only be a posture."

Little Red twitches and grasps his bourbon glass tightly. Despite his harsh kidding, Ring really means no harm — he is only covering up fears that he will be rejected anyway — but Little Red has, twenty years later, yet to truly recover from the numerous shocks and insults of his life, not excluding the Nobel Prize certificate when he was somewhat young and his strange last years when he switched from trying to write all the books in the world to trying to drink all the liquor. "You were overrated yourself," Little Red mumbles. "You had at best a mimetic gift. Mimetic. Hemolytic. Hemolytic euthanasia and Paul de Kruif, that imposter," he says and spills his drink all over himself. He subsides quaking while I work on him with napkins tenderly. One must respect a Nobel Prize certificate winner, particularly in our division of writer's heaven where there are only five and each a more insistent drinker than the others. "Terribly obliged," Big Red says to me while I help him up to his normal, lurching posture. "Appreciate what you're all trying to do for me, and if I had stayed away from that bitch, I might have had a wonderful career."

"It is easy for you to talk of careers," Ring says, his large forehead shining, little quivers of light seeming to emanate in a precarious but dignified fashion from the gin tumbler which he similarly holds in dignified fashion, "but what did you know of life? What did you know of the true morality of your day? You did blind, cheerful morality tales and ended up trying to screw in ten languages and failing in them all."

It occurs to me reminiscently how peaceful it is when Ring is not around, which is most of the time, but is in his arena of choice, the brothel, making up for lost days on earth. It is really a more peaceful and far friendlier drinking place without Ring, he even makes Big Ernie look tolerable, but Ring out of some sense of guilt or need for his fellow writers feels forced to come back occasionally and create scenes exactly like this. "Anyway," Ring says, toasting me, "this is the only man here who knows anything about sports, which is, as we all know, the only thing worth talking about."

"Excuse me," the Russian says prodding me gently. His eyes are lustrous and have the look of a $3500 plater going to the post with allowance fillies of a higher but less predictable class, but then again this may be only my term of reference. The Russian is quite mysterious. No one really understands him. Since his vanquishment of Big Ernie (who has not been around

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since the Russian's day of arrival), he has proven himself capable of drinking as much or even more than the best of us, not excluding Little Red, but in the matter of voluntary personal information or the intercourse of friendly exchange he offers none. "Who is this person?" he says to me, pointing at Ring. Apparently he has chosen me as his confidant and source of information, an odd position to be in since, even though I was at one time a gossip columnist, I have always been uneasy in the presence of those who are considered haute cuisine. "I repeat my question," the Russian says, "I wish to know who is this individual who is interrupting my consideration of eternity and the procession of the trudging weary and sinister creatures thereof."

"What kind of crap is this?" Ring says. "What is this man talking? German?"

I make a quieting gesture to him. Little Red at least is silent, muttering about his plans for Paul de Kruif when that eminent personage returns from doctor's heaven where he is apparently gathering notes. "This is Ring of the Thousand Faces," I say to the Russian. "He began by writing sports but later turned to short stories of a disturbing and most equivocal nature to humor before he did plays and musicals of a frivolous key. In between he did a few novels about sad baseball players. All of the time he was drinking and then he drunk lots more and died."

"What is baseball?" the Russian says. "I mean I know it is your national game and I made a study of some of your customs but of what significance is it?"

"Who is this person?" Ring says. "This person is a bum in a high cocked hat. He should be denied the premises." Ring is a belligerent drunk. Sad thoughts of his missing friend Mencken are apt to come out at times like these. "Henry knew what garbage this all was," Ring says as if in confirmation. "He would throw the foreigners out. Who needs Russians? Who needs foreigners? No one has a right to pass judgment on us but us, and I want another goddamned drink. Throw the bum out."

"I agree with that," Little Red says, lurching across to throw an arm around Ring's shoulder. "This is an American era; an American heaven here. No one from out of state has the right to tell us what to do."

"Get away from me," Ring says in disgust. "The trouble with you is that you have no capacity."

It is, as if one could not have already this inferred, a tense moment in writer's heaven, compounded of doubt and hatred, the self-loathing of many of the occupants, which

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persists even past death, and the very personalities of the Ring and the Russian, which, as they say in the lamented and still-missed Mindy's restaurant, are created to abrade one another. The bartender has of course slid completely from view, as all bartenders in writer's heaven do when either fights or credit requests are perpetrated, and it falls upon me to take on the uneasy and not really sought-for role of peacemaker, a role from which I shrink even more than usual because I am rather drunk myself. One of the more decent aspects of what they have done for us is that two drinks now do the work that eight were needed to do, and under the physical pressure I can feel myself begin to sway. "Come on now," Little Red says to me confidentially. "Buck up. Don't vomit. Vomiting will get you nowhere."

"Get out of this place," Ring says to the Russian. "I will not return to my other activities until I know that you no longer sully these environs."

"You are an offensive man," the Russian says. "Your offensiveness of course comes from pain —"

"Don't tell me about pain, you royalist creep."

— "And your pain from your acceptance of these circumstances; your, shall I say, *belief* that this is real and your own sense of loss comes from the deprivation of other real objects. I will tell you what," the Russian says, "I will make things easier for you and take away your argumentative obsession. I will prove to you that none of this exists, that it is a gaiety, a facade, a construction of the ciphers of our own wishes."

"He keeps on talking like that," Little Red mutters, clutching me. "I don't understand this shit. I'm just a simple Midwesterner. A good smoker, that's all I ever wanted, a couple of jokes, some naked women, a few laughs. Some gin. He talks and talks but he says nothing."

"I will tell you," the Russian says, backing away from the bar and spreading his arms in a grandiose gesture, "I will demonstrate for you the vanity, the hollowness, the tentativeness and artful nature of these concealments, and devolving from same, you will cease your aggression. Your drunkenness comes from an infantile need to anneal pain of loss, but I will prove to you that there is no loss and your pain therefore causeless. Mark ye well," the Russian says.

"I'm drunk too," Little Red sobs. "I'm not in pain. I didn't miss anything. I married that red-headed bitch and had the big prize at forty. I drink for *fun*, that's what."

But Ring, silenced for the first time in all of the years of our acquaintancing, is looking at the Rus-

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sian in wonder. "What are you talking about?" he says but without animosity. "Are you saying that all of this is illusion?" His voice is gentle. Ring is not known as the Thousand Faces for nothing; he has moves like a female tag-team match in the near corner. Now all that he projects is consternation. "Are you saying that it does not exist?"

"Of course it exists," the Russian cries and gestures at the walls, "of course it exists. Everything that ever was is at this moment, not, of course," he says, pausing to make gestures on his suddenly shiny cheekbones, "that the reverse of this is not true."

And it is at that moment that something weirdly metaphysical happens, and one rather beyond my own rather halting powers of the descriptive facility. Howie the P, who is unfortunately an infrequenter of these spaces, would perhaps do a better job of explanation, but the P does not believe in the applications of drink, preferring vigorous courtyard pacing in pursuit of red snakes and flying eagles, and therefore it is left to me, remembering all of the time of course that even the respected and lovable P had a way of obscuring up his descriptions precisely at the point when they were most necessary, an old trick for which he narrowly missed writer's hell, if last-moment pity had not been taken by the management. Suffice to say that the walls of our bar seem to dissolve to give a clear, unimpeded perspective of the other buildings, but just as we are espying some particularly random and active goings on in the brothel that amaze us and give me an entirely new view of that aspect, but in a flickering the brothel too and of itself disappears, and we are looking to the clear, dead, empty panels of space itself; space then parts and we see the world. I see the very world. I see the parts of the world that appealed to me.

I see, specifically the interior of Mindy's restaurant, which I happen to know has been not in existence now for a long time; it is crowded as it was in the old days and the old people are there: Carnera off in a corner with a woman looking sad and confused, the great Babe slinging quips with Mindy at the reservations desk, the sainted Winchell himself deep in consultation with two actresses whose bare shoulders I recognize. The scene is so vivid that it is as if I am there, as if I could lean forward just a critical additional space and become part of it the old days again, but just as I do so, this too dissolves, all of the parts of this famous restaurant going away, and I find that I am looking into a saddened, wizened enormous face which is that of the Russian itself. The face dwindles

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until it fills only the normal part of vision, and I am once more back in writer's heaven where the Russian claps his hands together and says, "You do see now. It is all created. It is all fabricate."

Ring, his eyes enormous says after a while, "That is a wonderful trick, a true prestidigitatory feat of wonder." Little Red, clutching at my knee, on the other hand says nothing at all. He has fallen down. He is whimpering something about Main Street to the cuff of my pants. "It was wonderful," Little Red says, "it was wonderful. It was always as I had remembered it. It is a wonderful trick."

"Thank you," the Russian says and, pleased, picks up his shot glass of neat vodka. Unwillingly pleased, he seems to beam. "It is all part of circumstance," he says and permits himself the smallest of smiles, and it is at that bucolic and pastoral moment when the threads of real communication seem for the first time to have been woven from Red to Russian to Ring to me the other *R* that the door swings open and Tom stomps in, kicking manure loudly from his farmer's boots and belching the scent of pumpkin pie. He bellows mad laughter.

"You pulling *that* shit?" Tom says and the walls shake with his enormous voice, "that *you are your world* kind of shit? Why I pulled that swindle way back in 1929," and it is at this moment, as the Russian turns to him, his regal features suffused with more than vodka, ready for a mad charge which Red and Ring and I brace to restrain ... it is at that exact and precise moment that I see that the end of another more or less normal day in writer's heaven has, and not a moment too soon, arrived.

Coming next month

Two extraordinary sf novelets —

IN ALIEN FLESH by GREGORY BENFORD

THE MORPHOLOGY OF THE KIRKHAM WRECK by HILBERT SCHENCK

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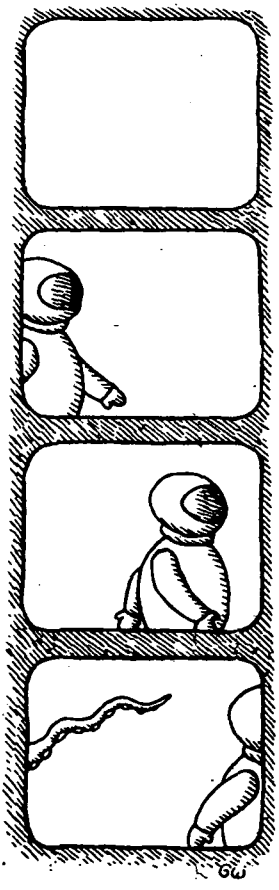
BAIRD SEARLES

Films and Television



LOSSES

To begin with the bad news, the worlds of science fiction and film have suffered two different kinds of losses. The really tragic one is that of Leigh Brackett, who died in March of this year. The film world lost a wonderful script writer (she wrote the superb first version of *The Big Sleep* with another talented writer named William Faulkner). Science fiction lost a major figure of its "Golden Age," who along with C. L. Moore proved that women could bring a very special excellence to the field.

Too long absent from s/f, she returned lately with the three Skaith books, and proved the glamorous old pizzazz was still there. And despite her well-known talents in both worlds, it never seemed to occur to Hollywood to pair them and have her write an s/f film until George Lucas asked her to work on the sequel to *Star Wars*. If it retains the Brackett touch, it will be one of those rare sequels worth waiting for.

I'm of mixed feelings about *Star Wars* losing the big one — the Oscar for best picture. I know if it had won it would have been for the wrong reason — primarily that it made a lot of money. I.e. if that pic-

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ture had been exactly the same picture and had *not* grossed the incredible amount it did, it almost surely would not have been nominated.

On the other hand, I sincerely believed it did deserve the award for sheer originality of concept (I'm talking *film* concept now, not science fictional concept — it *is* a film award). It was almost an entirely new kind of movie, beautifully realized.

And it would have been most satisfying for us vintage s/f readers who have coped with the question of "What do you see in that stuff" for a quarter century or more.

The major work up for consideration this month is yet another production of *Dracula*. Mr. Stoker's creation does indeed seem to have an unnatural immortality and vitality. There are equally successful stage versions running at the moment on- and off-Broadway (at least one of which is to be filmed), and NET brought us this month the first (so far as I can remember) version to be made for television.

It was a far cry from the Hammer films, though made in England. The sets and camera work combined to make it extremely beautiful to the eye; the *mise en scene* had the dim and cluttered quality of Victorian photographs, and also reflected the peculiar ambiance of the novel, which if you've read it, you will remember as being pretty cluttered itself. (If you haven't, the novel's form is extremely rambling, and told in many bits and pieces.)

In fact, a major question raised by this production *is* in its fidelity to the novel. I firmly believe that if a movie is made from a literary work, it has to be almost entirely reconceived in terms of the new medium. (That is very much how earlier versions of *Dracula* were produced, with greater or lesser degrees of success.)

Somehow though, this TV production managed to be an absorbing film experience despite the fact that it replayed the novel almost scene-by-scene, and what we seemed to have was a book illustrated with pictures that happened to move and speak dialogue. (I *do* have my doubts as to whether it made much sense to anyone who had not read the original.)

Another impressive aspect of this *Dracula* was the acting, a matter I seldom mention here for obvious reasons. The actor portraying Quincey had a bit of a problem with the exotic Texas accent, but there was a marvelously spunky Mina, and Louis Jourdan as the Count was extraordinary. Those who remember him from his '40s and '50s movies know that he was one of those men so handsome as to

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seem plastic. The beauty is still there, but ravaged by time, a perfect look for the immortal vampire. He played the role very differently from Lugosi's reptilian exoticism or Lee's overt force-of-evil quality. Jourdan was cool, very cool indeed. His reading of the famous "Listen to them, the children of the night. What music they make" lines was almost thrown away, but chillingly effective. He could as well have been telling the listener to harken to the crickets.

To pick a few nits, some of the transformation scenes did not come off very well, particularly those using real bats, which I tend to view, perhaps eccentrically, as rather dear little animals.

Nevertheless, a *Dracula* worth seeing, and knowing NET, it will probably be repeated.

Longtime readers of this column will know I have mentioned George Lucas's *THX-1138* every time it has appeared locally; one reason for this is that it is one of those rare works of art in which one sees something new on every viewing. And by golly it's happened again. This time it was one of those aspects I had realized intellectually but not appreciated fully: that the climactic chase is abandoned because the computed minute-by-minute cost is going above budget. Now there's a *deus ex machina* worth its salt. And there is still the incredible visual beauty of the film, and the consistent complexity that makes one feel like a Neanderthal watching *Rock Follies.*

Funniest line of the month: someone giving directions on *Quark* — "In the sacred valley, just beyond the roddenberry bush."

Things - to - come - dept.... Perhaps by the time this sees print, a TV-movie-cum-pilot called *Galactica;* interstellar pioneers with Lorne Green ... And Bakshi's *The Lord of the Rings* also looms threateningly over the horizon (*who's* pre-prejudiced?) ... New York's WNET has had in the works for some time a multi-part series of dramatized s/f, for which they have consulted some knowledgeable people (myself among them, he says modestly). They have finally announced the initial project, a two part version of Le Guin's *The Lathe of Heaven.* We wish them luck (he says ambiguously).

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Well, here it is, 1978, and we've been to the Moon and built the Alaskan pipeline, but we still *can't speak to animals. Animal communication remains a fascinating mystery, and here is a fascinating story about an experiment which attempts to bridge the gap between the minds of a human and a cat.*

The Interface

by LARRY EISENBERG

I can still recall the exhilaration I felt on entering Merriweather University. Merriweather had been founded by a robber baron of the same name some sixty years earlier in an attempt to expiate his predatory sins. But the passage of the years and eighteen Nobel awards had turned his namesake into a synonym for pure research.

As a graduate student in this scientific wonderland, I plunged into my studies with great vigor. I focused all my energies on the nervous system of mammals with an eye to ultimately fathoming all of the deep secrets of the brain. It was a young man's fantasy, but an understandable one.

Of all the stellar figures at Merriweather, none was more luminous than Dr. Winthrop Pennington. He was a neurophysiologist whose work in explaining every facet of the cat brain was a model of scientific clarity. He was also a wit with an inexhaustible store of bawdy anecdotes. I first saw him one day stumbling along a hallway, placing his feet very tentatively as if searching for the whereabouts of the floor. His features were puffy, the eyes leaden.

One of the other graduate students, Bert Flood, who was walking at my side, enlightened me, after we had gone sufficiently further on.

"You've just seen Winthrop Pennington," he said mockingly. "Nobel laureate in medicine and campus lush."

"That's incredible," I said. "How could a drunk do the kind of work he did?"

"Because," said Flood, "he didn't start heavy drinking until *after* his award. Maybe it was a kind of postpartum depression. Or maybe it was the death of his wife."

My romantic fancies were stimulated.

"Ah, ha," I said. "The whole

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thing is clear. Eminent scientist wins the top laurel, and, at the pinnacle of what he sought after, his beloved life's companion expires. Crushed at the moment that should be sweetest of all, he turns to alcohol."

"That's not quite it," said Bert Flood. "But I like it better than the real reason."

"What's that?"

"Who knows?" said Bert. "Only Winthrop Pennington does, and he hasn't told."

For months thereafter I would pass Pennington in the hallway, sniffing at the haze of alcohol that always seemed to surround him. But, one day, he walked briskly into the faculty-student dining room and took a seat next to mine. Hesitatingly I introduced myself to him, and he reciprocated. Then he winked at me. I was startled at the insouciance of the wink and the brightness of his eyes. He seemed fit as a fiddle.

Bert Flood, who was seated across the table from both of us, struck up a conversation with him. Soon they were in a warm but friendly argument.

"I'm not being critical of your experiments," said Dr. Pennington to Bert. "But I'm rather skeptical of behavioral studies done with animals. We condition them to do certain things by rewarding them or punishing them. And then we speculate on what this might mean in the total picture. But we have no idea of what's going on in the animal's mind."

Bert seemed outraged by this comment.

"To speak of an animal's *mind*," he said, "seems silly."

Pennington smiled, not a bit upset.

"Does it? Why?"

"Because," said Bert, "you're assuming that animals have the counterpart of the human mind. True, they have a nervous system including a brain, but we have no idea of whether what we call emotion is involved. We're aware of the elemental drives of sex, hunger, and so forth. But to talk about knowing what's in an animal's mind is a kind of anthropomorphization."

"A good word, that," said Pennington, and everyone at the table laughed.

All but Bert Flood. He flushed, and Pennington caught his embarrassment.

"Hold on," he said apologetically. "I wasn't making fun of my young colleague here. As a matter of fact, I think he's absolutely right. I was using the term 'mind' in its loosest sense because I'm quite aware that we have no way of knowing what is *really* going on in the animal's brain. Worst of all, there's

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no way of ever finding out."

"Perhaps we could," I said very tentatively.

There was a silence about the table. Pennington cocked his head to one side and studied me quizzically. I found my tongue again.

"What I meant was, suppose some kind of interpretive interface could be interposed between the animal and the human, an interface that could bridge the gap between what the animal experiences through his nervous system and what the human mind would derive from the same external sources."

Pennington stroked his chin for a long moment.

"It's a hell of a lot to think about, isn't it?" he said.

Later that afternoon the spring sun began to raise the temperature to summer levels. I sat down on the lush green grass and inhaled the fragrant smells of the earth. And then I became aware of someone standing nearby, looking down at me. It was Dr. Pennington.

"Taking in the sun?" he asked genially.

I nodded. I had opened up more than I usually did at the lunch table, and I was a little embarrassed at the recollection.

"I was thinking of what you said a while back," said Dr. Pennington. "I found it very provocative. Have you decided which laboratory you plan to work in?"

"Not yet," I said.

He smiled.

"Well, before you come to any hard decisions, give mine some consideration, won't you?"

I gulped my thanks, and with a wave of his hand he was off down the gravel path. For the rest of that afternoon, I floated off the ground.

I did not take up his offer immediately. There were a number of basic courses I had to complete, particularly in biochemistry. But at the end of the year I went to see him. He looked trimmer than I had ever seen him, and there was no trace of those tiny inflamed red veins in his eyes. It was evident that he had not been drinking for a long time.

"I've come to work for you," I said. "That is, if your offer is still open."

"Of course it's open." He seemed absolutely delighted and went immediately to his cupboard. "Shall we celebrate this occasion?" he asked. He was holding a bottle of wine in his hand.

I didn't know what to say.

"It's all right," he said. "I'm joining you in spirit only, not in spirits. I have no illusions about my limits. I know that I'm an alcoholic who's on the wagon at the moment. But I could tumble easily."

And that was the last word

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either of us had on this matter for a long time.

I assisted Dr. Pennington for months thereafter, preparing his cats for dissection and monitoring recordings of electrical activity from glass micropipettes. He was an exacting teacher, never satisfied with less than perfection. And when we had a preparation going, we would sometimes continue through the night and into the following morning without letup.

After a year of this sort of thing I had developed considerable expertise. I was even permitted to carry out some experiments on my own in an attempt to find out if motion of cat forelimbs caused electrical activity in certain areas of the brain. From time to time Dr. Pennington and I would chat informally on the question that had been raised some time back, the question of an interface between animal and human. I found these discussions provocative and tantalizing. At best, they were inconclusive.

One morning, after a twenty-hour bout without letup, we sat in Dr. Pennington's office, too exhausted to move. He was drinking coffee out of a chemical beaker, muttering to himself.

"Why couldn't one?" he was saying. "Why not?"

"Do what?" I asked.

He shrugged.

"The idea is preposterous and I know it. But it has allure. I was pondering the feasibility of placing a human brain in the cat's skull case. Mind you, I can cite every objection — the problem of tissue rejection, the incompatibility of size. And of course there would be the impossible surgical task of getting circulatory loops closed and grafting nerve bundles together."

"It might be a child's brain," I said. "That would take care of the problem of size. And of course, the tissue rejection problem seems close to solution."

"And," said Pennington, "nerve-grafting experiments have been increasingly successful."

"But the surgery," I offered. "I see no immediate hope there."

He was glum.

"I suppose you're right," he said. "Still, there have been crazier ideas tried in science. And some have even worked."

"The greatest problem," I said, "is one we haven't even touched on. It's the question of what the response of the human brain would mean in such a case."

Dr. Pennington played with his ear lobe.

"I would assume," he said finally, "that the electrical signals received by that transplanted human brain would be uninterpretable. It would be like making sense of a jumble of noise."

"And so we come back to our

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old standby," I said, "the interpretative black box that would translate the cat's nerve impulses to a pattern that's meaningful to the human brain."

"An on-line computer, properly programmed?" asked Dr. Pennington.

"I think that's the wrong way," I said tentatively. "But I'd like to give it more thought."

Dr. Pennington laughed.

"Give it all the time you want," he said. "But don't be afraid to tell me about it. I promise I won't smile."

"I don't think you will," I said.

About a month later, Dr. Pennington did something he had never done before. He invited me to his home for dinner.

"Dress informally," he said. "It will just be my wife and myself. I'd like her to meet you."

I had not even known that he had remarried, for he was always close-mouthed about his private life. I was curious and anxious at the same time, but I was dying to go. When it came to picking out a small house gift, I was puzzled. Wine or brandy would probably be in bad taste under the circumstances. I finally went to a tiny German confectionery shop and bought an elegant assortment of homemade marzipan.

The Penningtons lived in a posh high-rise apartment not too far from the university. The five rooms were spacious and pleasantly decorated in Danish modern. I was jolted, however, by the appearance of Mrs. Pennington. Somehow I had anticipated a much older woman, but the second Mrs. Pennington seemed no more than thirty-five. She was sleek, well groomed, immaculately dressed in a tight black skirt and a white blouse with a Peter Pan collar. Her bright yellow hair was pulled tightly in a bun at the nape of her neck. And a fresh delicate perfume seemed to surround her. I found myself staring at her with an open mouth. She seemed to enjoy my response and put out her hand to me. I took hold of it and she shook my hand warmly.

"Winthrop has told me a great deal about you," she said.

Her voice was deep, with a sensual quality that sent a tingle up my spine. I found thoughts drifting into my mind that made me flush with embarrassment. I caught tight hold of myself and thanked her for the invitation. The words sounded stiff and artificial to my ears.

During the dinner, a coq au vin affair that had been catered from an outside shop, she questioned me on my family and my views. Dr. Pennington just looked on amiably, saying very little. During dessert, Mrs. Pennington cocked her head

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to one side and jolted me with a direct question.

"Do you believe in sexual promiscuity?"

I flushed.

"My God," she said. "I thought blushing was out of style, and this young man has done it twice in the space of an hour. He really is quite exceptional."

"It's a private matter," said Dr. Pennington quickly, and for the first time there was a sense of disapproval in his voice.

"That's all right," I said. "I was just caught off-guard by the question. All of the people of my generation want honesty in our sexual relations. We think there's been a lot of hypocrisy, and we want none of it. But the alternative is not necessarily promiscuity."

"Bravo," said Dr. Pennington.

"Nonsense," said his wife. "Artificial restraints are unhealthy. Just take a look at Cyrus over there."

She pointed to the beautifully formed Persian cat that had stretched out on the rug, combing his whiskers with a dexterous paw. He had caught my eye all evening because of the complete disdain with which he treated Dr. Pennington. He padded about with an air of arrogance, ignoring my attempt to caress his head as though I didn't exist. But he often looked at Mrs. Pennington, and the golden yellow eyes seemed to come alive.

"Cyrus goes out every night," said Dr. Pennington, "and God knows who he's tomcatting with. To my knowledge there's no feline counterpart of the venereal diseases, or he'd have them all. But of course he isn't a human, and, for all we know, he may be experiencing paradisiac delights."

I couldn't resist twitting Dr. Pennington.

"We'll never know," I said, "will we?"

"Don't bet on it," he said.

I dreamed all night of Mrs. Pennington. The yellow hair had come loose and shaken its fresh delicate perfume over my mouth and eyes. Later in the afternoon our experimental cat died abruptly on the dissecting table. I felt that it was a punishment.

"Oh, to Hell with it," said Dr. Pennington. "It was just one of those things. Come inside and relax a bit."

We went into his office, and he put some water on to boil for coffee. As I peered at the water, waiting for the bubbles to form, I heard Dr. Pennington clear his throat.

"What did you think of my wife?" he asked.

I didn't turn to look at him.

"A marvelous hostess," I said.

"Grace is a good woman," he said. "Some of our friends think

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we're a typical May-September marriage, but they're wrong. Our relationship goes deeper than the physical. Despite her seemingly seductive manner, she's been a good and faithful wife."

I felt as if he'd read my mind.

"I'm sure she is," I said.

Dr. Pennington sighed.

"Grace was my attendant. She helped me break away from the Demon. During those long difficult months, she hardly left my side. Without her I'd never have made it."

I looked away. I didn't quite know what answer he expected.

"Mind you," he added, "I don't agree with everything she says. And she thinks my ideas are stodgy."

"Old-fashioned?"

"Perhaps, although I wouldn't agree. I think it's the promiscuity and swinging that's really old-fashioned. After all, it's been the approach of every well-to-do decadent group in history. And our young middle-class youths and lasses think they've stumbled onto something entirely new."

He shook his head wistfully.

"You won't believe this," he said, "but viscerally I'm on their side. At heart I'd like to be a swinger."

"It's hard to visualize," I said.

He sighed.

"You see? You can't even *picture* it. I must confess that my actions have always been prosaic and humdrum, even though my store of dirty stories was once my pride and joy. My thoughts roam to daring extremes, but my conscience binds me to the conventional. It's been the sad story of my life."

"Sad story? You've won the Nobel Prize. I'd trade everything for that."

He looked at me sharply.

"You're wrong," he said angrily. "It's a stupid, idiotic thing to say."

I sat there stunned, my jaw hanging open at his heated remark. He quickly caught my hurt and tried to smooth over the discomfort.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm just reacting to the personal tragedy I went through. Nothing was worth that."

I could sense what he was thinking. His first wife had died soon afterwards. What a blow it must have been!

He seemed to be aware of my thoughts.

"It wasn't the death of my wife. She and I had very little in common. She was ambitious and propagandized constantly among all of my colleagues. She had once been my lab technician, you see, and was convinced that I deserved the Big Prize. Maybe she was right. But time after time, she humiliated me with her aggressive public relations-oriented remarks before vis-

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itors. At the time of her death, we hadn't slept together for almost three years."

I coughed. I was acutely uncomfortable at this soul baring. But this time he didn't seem aware of my discomfort.

"My great emotional shock came *after* the Prize," he said. "It seemed to drain all ambition out of my hide, and the worst of it was that I had not accomplished what I had originally set out to do."

"What was that?"

"The very thing you raised at lunch that day, the interpretive interface between animal and man. I've achieved many things in my years of work, but they were mostly due to painstaking hours of careful experimentation, the fruits of a laboriously acquired technique, and not through some inspired theoretical model. I felt that *I* had not won the Prize. It was my wife's bullying and bragging. The aggressive advertising and drumbeating had done it for me."

"You seem to have overcome that feeling."

"Grace deserves all the credit for that," he said.

The water had finally come to a boil, and he poured it over our instant-coffee powder. There was no further conversation that afternoon.

I suppose the origins of our breakthrough can be traced to Duckworth's paper in *Science*. The great biochemist, acting out of his specialty, had developed a way of implanting tiny integrated circuit transducers in animal brains. These devices picked up the electrical signals generated in the cortex and transmitted them to external receivers by radio wave. I saw the possibilities immediately.

I said nothing to Dr. Pennington but went instead to Duckworth's laboratory in the chemistry building. He was Patience itself, letting me see how he sutured the tiny devices to the connective tissue without damaging cells. He also let me take five of the little transducers with me.

I wrote to the manufacturer of these integrated circuits and got all of the pertinent literature he would send me. I went through all of the references until I was familiar with the theory underlying the operation of the transducers. Then I privately experimented with animal preparations. Dr. Pennington knew that I was undertaking something new, but, true to character, he did not question me. I went on this way for months, until I had become certain that my approach was feasible, and then I went to see him.

He looked at me almost hungrily.

"Are you ready to spill the beans?" he asked.

"All I have."

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I brought out a reprint of Duckworth's paper and showed him the tiny transducers.

"I've read the paper," he said, "but I've never seen these little beggars before. Are they are remarkable as he says?"

"More so. They require no external power source because they work on the small local temperature differentials in the brain itself. They are also highly efficient oscillators and, with a good receiver, can be picked up over a range of several hundred yards."

"Incredible," said Dr. Pennington. "But that isn't really what you came to tell me, is it? You've worked out a scheme for our interface, haven't you?"

"I think so," I said. "I propose that we implant hundreds of these tiny chips in the brain of a cat in carefully chosen sites. Each of these chips will be made to oscillate at a slightly different carrier frequency. At the same time, we'll implant the same number of chips, at matching frequencies, in the brain of a human volunteer."

"Stop right there," said Dr. Pennington. "I want to see if I catch your drift. In this way, we could constrain the electrical signals of the two brains to track together, the animal acting as the transmitter, the human as the receiver."

I was both delighted and upset at his words. He *had* caught the essence of what I intended, but his use of "we" indicated his takeover of my idea. I fought off this possessive feeling — after all, everything had been planned on a shared basis before this. What was wrong with me?

"The human can act as transmitter, too," I pointed out. "And there's still the question of interpreting the signals. We'll have to find some kind of Rosetta stone to translate the strange signals that the receiving human brain will pick up."

"It's not an unsurmountable problem," said Dr. Pennington. He was on his feet now, pacing back and forth in agitation. "The big problem, mundane as it may seem, is to choose the surgeon who will do the implanting. And then we'll have to find our human volunteer."

I took a deep breath.

"I'm willing to volunteer," I said.

"Oh, no," said Dr. Pennington. "I won't hear of it. We can't afford to let you take that kind of risk."

He put his hand on my shoulder and looked at me with great warmth. I was moved by his obvious affection.

"I expect great things from you," he said. "Perhaps it's a bit premature to say, but I think you'll fulfill every one of my expectations."

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I was not aware of it at the time, but our work had only just begun. Dr. Pennington insisted first on seeing if one cat's brain could be made to "track" with that of another. We prepared two animals in an identical way, implanting one hundred chips in the brain site corresponding to movements of the left forelimb. Before trying out the crucial experiment, my mouth went dry. I tried sucking on a mint but no saliva would flow. Dr. Pennington had our "transmitting" animal in one room, a room that was isolated from the one in which I waited with my "receiving" cat. We had synchronized our watches some fifteen minutes earlier and had agreed on set times when Dr. Pennington would raise and lower his cat's left forelimb.

I checked my watch. A movement was imminent. The hair at the nape of my neck elevated as the left forelimb of my cat suddenly raised and lowered, just as planned. Again and again, at the times scheduled, the movement took place. And then the door to my room burst open. Dr. Pennington stood there, looking at me.

"It worked!" I shouted. "Goddamn it, it worked!"

His eyes filled with tears. He stood there shaking his head in disbelief. I ran over and we embraced each other.

"Damn it," he said finally. "I'm not crying because it worked. It's because I can't take the stiff drink I need and deserve."

It broke the emotional tension and we both laughed. But there was still another hurdle to overcome.

We now had the job of finding a surgeon who would carry out the operation on a human volunteer. We had not pursued the question of who the volunteer would be, although I had accepted Dr. Pennington's insistent assertion that I could not be the one. Perhaps some prisoner would volunteer on the promise of a reduction of sentence. But every surgeon we approached seemed to feel that our project was insane.

One prominent brain surgeon, who seemed intrigued by our scheme, pointed out that a very large number of these implants would be needed, that the exact location of these sites in man was not that completely understood, and that a fairly large section of the skull would have to be removed to carry out this experiment. Dr. Pennington was undaunted.

"If I guarantee you the volunteer," he said, "would you do the surgery?"

"With a waiver of any damages?"

"Absolutely," said Dr. Pennington.

The surgeon sighed.

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"I might consider it," he said.

I should have realized then that Dr. Pennington had himself in mind as the volunteer. I was called to his apartment one night, and Grace Pennington let me in, holding my hand for a minute longer than was necessary. I looked at the soft curve of her neck as she reached down and stroked Cyrus, the Siamese, and I thought the animal was in a transport of ecstasy.

"He loves it, doesn't he?" I asked.

Dr. Pennington spoke from somewhere behind me.

"He and Grace are very simpatico," he said enviously. "They'd probably make an ideal pair for the experiment."

I laughed at what was clearly meant to be a joke.

"I don't think Mrs. Pennington would approve," I said.

She shuddered.

"Implant those ugly things in *my* brain? Not on your life!"

"I suppose not," said Dr. Pennington. "Maybe what seems obvious is wrong. Perhaps Cyrus ought to be paired with someone he has contempt for, like me. Look at those enormous eyes; they seem to be made out of glacial ice."

"That's unfair," cried Mrs. Pennington. "Cyrus is a passionate male. If he were only a man, my God ..."

"I know, I know," interrupted Dr. Pennington brusquely. "But he's not. If he were, I'd throw him out of the house."

I looked away, acutely uncomfortable at this byplay.

"Well, anyway," I said, "Cyrus is not going to be a part of our experiment."

But when I looked at Dr. Pennington, I wasn't sure.

When Dr. Pennington announced one day that he was going to Copenhagen to visit the neurophysiological lab of a friend, I thought nothing of it. His wife wanted to go along, but he managed to dissuade her without too much argument. I even came to dinner, one night, while he was away.

Almost ten days later, I received a call from him.

"My God," I said. "Is this a transoceanic call?"

"Don't be a fool," he said goodhumoredly. "I'm at Mount Halcyon Hospital. The one in Westchester."

"What's wrong?" I cried. "What happened to you?"

"Come see me," he said. "I'm in Room 201. But first you must swear not to tell my wife a single word of this."

I agreed, but I still didn't suspect what had happened until I saw him. The bandages on his head were the giveaway. He followed the

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direction of my eyes.

"You're right," he said. "But look at it logically. I've won my Prize. I want you to enjoy yours. I'm a shade over sixty, and although I want to live, it would be no great tragedy if I didn't."

"But the risks," I said. "You could have become a human vegetable. I shudder at the thought of what you've chanced."

He shrugged.

"*You* were ready to take them. And I seem to have come through with only minimal side effects."

"Minimal? What side effects are you talking about?"

"There seems to be a slight impairment of my motor controls," he said. "I don't walk too well, as yet. My left leg tends to drag. And it may never get better. But I feel it's a trifling price to pay."

I shook my head violently.

"It's much too stiff a price. I should never have started this line of research. I was an ambitious self-centered bastard!"

"So was I," he said. "But that's exactly what a good scientist must be." Then he grinned. "I'd have done it with or without you. But of course, without you I might never have dreamed up this scheme."

You're goddamn right, I thought.

But I said nothing. The conflicting feelings of triumph and guilt were too much for me to handle.

"What about the cat?" I asked. "When will he be operated on?"

"He has been already," said Dr. Pennington. "Just go next door and take a look."

I went into the hallway and peeked into the adjoining room. I couldn't believe what I saw. I went back into Dr. Pennington's room.

"My God!" I cried. "You've used Cyrus."

He shook his head.

"It's another Persian. But he does look a hell of a lot like Cyrus. Maybe that's why I chose him."

"The resemblance is uncanny."

Dr. Pennington rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"For a while I seriously considered using Cyrus. But I never dared broach the idea to my wife."

"I don't think it would have worked," I said.

"Well, anyway," said Dr. Pennington, "in exactly two days, we'll begin our first interface contacts. Both the cat and myself will be placed in the same room, blindfolded of course. I will then simply try to evaluate his feelings."

"And thoughts?"

Dr. Pennington chuckled.

"And thoughts, if there are any."

Two days later I smuggled the prepared cat into Dr. Pennington's lab. It was a Sunday, and there was almost no one on campus. Dr. Pen-

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nington was already there, waiting patiently in his office. I called him into the laboratory, making certain that he had blindfolded his eyes against the light. The Persian had been similarly prepared. I left them alone and waited inside Dr. Pennington's office.

I'm not a cigarette smoker, but in that moment I'd have sold my soul for one. I sat there staring at the clock, wondering what the hell was happening and furious that I had been cheated out of the opportunity to be the first to participate. And then, after about forty minutes had gone by, Dr. Pennington limped into the office. He had removed the blindfold, but I could detect no expression in his eyes beyond a deep thoughtfulness. I said nothing and neither did he. After a while, he spoke.

"I know you're anxious to hear about my experience, but I honestly can't describe it too well, as yet. I was flooded with sensations, that much is sure. But as we expected, interpreting these sensations will be a long, agonizingly difficult project, one which may never succeed."

"But you did pick up his transmitted signals?"

Dr. Pennington smiled.

"Of *that* I'm certain. And I have little doubt that he picked up mine."

In the days that followed, the experiments became more elaborate. One entire series involved transmission from Dr. Pennington to the cat. First the cat was fed until he absolutely would eat no more. At the same time Dr. Pennington deprived himself of food until he was ravenously hungry. He then entered the cat's room, and after a brief pause the cat began to eat.

Our excitement was enormous. We had to remove the food, or the cat would have eaten himself into a stupor. Dr. Pennington entered the data very carefully in his large hardbound gray notebook, using a thin old-fashioned hand. We repeated the experiment several times, and it worked without fail. Dr. Pennington called me into his office one day.

"We really have enough to publish right now," he said. "The only reason I've held off, thus far, is because all of it concerns things I've caused the cat to do. As yet, I have nothing to report on his effects on me."

"It may turn out that he *can't* affect you," I said. "Maybe a lower mammal can't transmit signals of great enough complexity to do more than create a minor perturbation in the human mind."

"No," he said. "That's not it at all. I *feel* tremendous emotional reactions that are transmitted from the cat. But, so far, I just can't or-

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ganize these reactions into a scientifically coherent and meaningful structure. And yet I feel as though everything is on the tip of my tongue, just waiting to be put into the right words."

"Have you written down any of these feelings?"

"Not yet. Perhaps I was the wrong choice for this experiment. I write a clean-enough scientific prose. But what's needed here is a poet."

"Maybe so. But I think that there's enough of the poet in you so that you *can* get it down on paper."

I didn't convince him that time. Later in the afternoon Grace Pennington came into the lab. She said nothing to Dr. Pennington but addressed herself directly to me.

"What would you say if I told you?" she began.

"Don't tell him," interrupted Dr. Pennington wearily.

She turned on him fiercely.

"I have to tell somebody," she cried. "First you have this absurd operation performed without my consent. And, thereafter, for over two months now, we haven't slept together."

"I see no reason to drag this matter out in public," he said angrily. "Surely even you must realize how important it is to keep my mind free of all outside influences. I must be completely attuned to whatever the cat transmits. Already, by starting this unpleasantness, you've probably set me back a couple of weeks."

She turned back to me, her eyes fixed on mine.

"Is this reasonable? Is it normal?" she asked bitterly. "Should a man risk his marriage because of an experiment?"

"It isn't an ordinary experiment," I said. "And please don't ask my opinion. I don't want to get involved in a personal dispute. But I do think the first phase of the experiment is nearly over. Don't you agree, Dr. Pennington?"

He nodded, grudgingly.

"Then you're finally coming home?" she asked.

"On Saturday."

She pressed his head against hers in a smoldering kiss. I envied him. When she had gone out, he glared at me.

"Because of your goddamned interference, I'll have to cut short this series of experiments by a full week."

"It'll be good for your marriage," I said.

He snorted.

"A fat lot you know."

But he finally did consent to end the first set of experiments, and I personally drove him home. He hesitated on the doorstep, and I wondered why.

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"With a lovely wife waiting for you, why are you standing here?"

He looked at me searchingly.

"You wouldn't understand," he said. "I'm afraid to go in."

I was stunned.

"Afraid? Of what?"

He started to tell me, then stopped and shrugged.

"No reason at all," he said. "It's all ridiculous."

He inserted his key in the lock, fumbled it in a clockwise direction and then went inside. I stood there uncertainly, wondering if I ought to follow him, feeling a presentiment of something gone wrong, but I stayed outside. I went back to the car and slipped into the driver's seat. I leaned over and looked up at his bedroom window. The light came on. I turned on my engine and started back home. I never saw him alive again.

The coroner's report read "Death by coronary occlusion." Perhaps that's what it was. After the well-attended funeral, I went back with Grace Pennington. We sat in her living room, drinking screwdrivers. She took three for every one I sipped.

"I was very fond of Winthrop," she said. "He was a good man, some say a great man."

"He *was* a great man," I said. "And a Nobel laureate."

"Our marriage wasn't easy."

I began to feel uncomfortable.

"It's late," I said. "Maybe I ought to leave and let you get some sleep."

"I couldn't possibly sleep now," she said. "Don't leave."

I looked at my watch.

"I'll stay a bit longer," I said.

"That last night is one I'll never forget," she said abruptly.

"How could you?"

She took another drink.

"No, no. It's not the way you think. I'm not talking about his death, itself. We made love before it happened, the most passionate love-making we'd ever engaged in."

"Look," I said. "That's a personal matter. I really don't think you want to tell me about it."

Her eyes began to smolder.

"Why not?" she asked. "You're liberated. You said so yourself. So is your whole goddamned generation."

I said nothing.

"When we were finished," she continued very deliberately, "Winthrop looked up and saw Cyrus lying near the bedroom wall. The eyes were enormous and seemed to be in an ecstatic state. They looked at each other and Winthrop seemed to recoil. 'It was *him*,' he gasped. 'Him, not me. Do you understand that?' and he shrank back on his pillow. I looked at him, baffled. 'What in God's name are you talking about?' I cried. He said noth-

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ing, just slumped back, clutching at his chest, eyes bulging. I checked his pulse. There was none. I put my mouth to his and tried to give him resuscitation. After a while I knew he was gone. By the time the ambulance arrived, there was nothing more to do."

I shuddered.

She looked at me speculatively.

"You *do* know what he was talking about, don't you?"

I shook my head. There could have been no electrical contact between them, that much was certain. And yet I did know what had happened. Dr. Pennington was not a poet, but he could feel like one. It was ironical. We had sought to manufacture an interface; yet he had been one all the while.

I got to my feet.

"I have to go now," I said.

She put out her hand and took tight hold of mine, placing her cheek against it and rubbing it very gently.

"Please stay," she said.

It wasn't easy, but I left. I owed that much to Dr. Pennington.

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Avram Davidson, one of the field's finest short story writers, has been a regular contributor since "My Boyfriend's Name Is Jello" appeared in the July 1954 issue. He was also F&SF's editor during the 1960's. Mr. Davidson is currently writer-in-residence at William and Mary College. His new story, one of his best, concerns the further adventures of Jack Limekiller ("Manatee Gal Ain't You Coming Out Tonight," April 1977).

A Good Night's Sleep

by AVRAM DAVIDSON

"Are those lahvly young ladies with you, then?" the Red Cross teacher asked.

Limekiller evaded the question by asking another, a technique at least as old as the Book of Genesis. "Which way did they go?" he asked.

But it did not work this time. "Bless me if I saw them gow anywhere! They were both just standing on the corner as I went by."

Limekiller gave up not so easily. "Ah, but which corner?"

A blank look. "Why ... *this* corner."

This corner was the corner of Grand Arawack and Queen Alexandra Streets in the Town of St. Michael of the Mountains, capital of Mountains District in the Colony of British Hidalgo. Fretwork galleries dripping with potted plants and water provided shade as well as free shower baths. These were the first and second streets laid out and had originally been deer trails; Government desiring District Commissioner Bartholomew "Bajan" Bainbridge to supply the lanes with names, he had, with that fund of imagination which helped build the Empire, called them First and Second Streets: it was rather a while before anyone in Government next looked at a map and then decided that numbered streets should run parallel to each other and not, as in this instance, across each other. And as the Grand Arawack Hotel was by that time built and as Alexandra (long-suffering consort of Fat Edward) was by that time Queen, thus they were renamed and thus had remained.

"St. Michael's" or "Mountains" Town, one might take one's pick, had once been a caravan city in miniature. The average person does not think of caravan cities being located in the Americas, and, for that matter, neither does any-

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one else. Nevertheless, trains of a hundred and fifty mules laden with flour and rum and textiles and tinned foods coming in, and with chicle and chicle and chicle going out, had been common enough to keep anyone from bothering to count them each time the caravans went by. The labor of a thousand men and a thousand mules had been year by year spat out of the mouths of millions of North Americans in the form of chewing gum.

So far as Limekiller knew, Kipling had never been in either Hidalgo, but he might have thought to have been if one ignored biographical fact and judged only by his lines,

Day long, the diamond weather,
The high, unaltered blue —
The smell of goats and incense
And the mule-bell tinkling
through.

Across from the hotel stood the abattoir and the market building. The very early morning noises were a series of bellows, bleats, squeals, and screams which drowned out cock-crow and were succeeded by the rattle and clatter of vulture claws on the red-painted corrugated iron roofs. Then the high voices of women cheapening meat. But all of these had now died away. Beef and pork and mutton (sheep or goat) could be smelled stewing and roasting now and then as the mild currents of the air alternated the odors of food with those of woodsmoke. He even thought he detected incense; there was the church spire nearby.

But there were certainly no young ladies around, lovely or otherwise.

There had been no very lengthy mule trains for a very long time.

There had been no flotillas of tunnel boats at the Town Wharf for a long time, either, their inboard motors drawn as high-up in "tunnels" within the vessels as possible to avoid the sand and gravel and boulders which made river navigation so difficult on the upper reaches of the Ningoon. No mule trains, no tunnel boats, no very great quantities of chicle, and everything which proceeded to and from the colonial capital of King Town and St. Michael's going now by truck along the rutted and eroded Frontier Road. No Bay boat could ever, in any event, have gotten higher up the river than the narrows called Bomwell's Boom; and the *Sacarissa* (Jno. Limekiller, owner and Master and, usually — save for Skippy the Cat — sole crew) was at the moment Hired Out.

She had been chartered to a pair of twosomes from a Lake Winnipeg boat club, down to enjoy the long hours of sunshine. Jack had been glad enough of the money but the charter had left him at somewhat of a loss: *leisure* to him had

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for so long meant leisure to haul his boat up and clean and caulk and paint her: all things in which boatmen delight. Leisure without the boat was something new. Something else.

To pay his currently few debts had not taken long. He had considered getting Porter Portugal to sew a new suit of sails, but old P.P. was not a slot machine; you could not put the price into P.P.'s gifted hands and expect, after a reasonable (or even an unreasonable) period of time, for the sails to pop out. If Port-Port were stone sober he would not work and if dead drunk he *could* not work. The matter of keeping him supplied with just the right flow of old Hidalgo dark rum to, so to speak, oil the mechanism, was a nice task indeed: many boat owners, National, North American, or otherwise, had started the process with intentions wise and good: but Old Port was a crazy-foxy old Port and all too often had drunk them under the table, downed palm and needle, and vanished with the advance-to-buy supplies into any one of the several stews which flourished on his trade. ("A debt of honor, me b'y," he would murmur, red-eyed sober, long days later. "Doesn't you gots to worry. I just hahs a touch ahv de ague, but soon as I bet-tah....")

So that was *one* reason why John L. Limekiller had eventually decided to forget the new suit of sails for the time being.

Filial piety had prompted him to send a nice long letter home, but a tendency towards muscle spasms caused by holding a pen had prompted him to reduce the n.l.l. to a picture post card. He saw the women at the post office, one long and one short.

"What's a letter *cost,* to St. Michael's?" the Long was asking. "We *could, tel*ephone for a reservation," the Short suggested. Jack was about to tell them, unsolicited, how fat the chance was of anybody in St. Michael's having a telephone *or* anything which could be reserved, let alone of understanding what a reservation was — then he took more than a peripheral look at them.

The Long had red hair and was wearing dungarees and a man's shirt. Not common, ordinary, just-plain-red: *cop*per-red. Worn in loops. Her shirt was blue with a faint white stripe. Her eyes were "the color of the sherry which the guests leave in the glass." Or don't, as the case may be. The Short could have had green hair in braids and been covered to her toes in a yashmak for all Jack noticed.

At that moment the clerk had asked him, "What fah you?" — a local, entirely acceptable usage, even commonplace, being higher than "What you want?" and lower

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than "You does want something?" — and by the time he had sorted out even to his own satisfaction that he wanted postage for a card to Canada and not, say, to send an armadillo by registered mail to Mauritius, and had completed the transaction in haste and looked around, trying to appear casual, they were gone. Clean gone. Where they had been was a bright-eyed little figure in the cleanest rags imaginable, with a sprinkling of white hairs on its brown, nutcracker jaws.

Who even at once declared, "'And now abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three, and the greatest of these is charity,' you would not deny the Apostle Paul, would you, then, sir?"

"Eh? Uh ... no," said Limekiller. Pretense cast aside, craning and gaping all around: *nothing.*

"Anything to offer me?" demanded the wee and ancient, with logic inexorable.

So there had gone a dime. And then and there had come the decision to visit St. Michael of the Mountains, said to be so different, so picturesque, hard upon the frontier of "Spanish" Hidalgo, and where (he reminded himself) he had after all *never been.*

Sometimes being lonely it bothers the way a tiny pebble in the shoe bothers: enough to stop and *do* something. But if one is very lonely indeed, then it becomes an accustomed thing. Only now did Limekiller bethink himself how lonely he had been. The boat and the Bay and the beastie-cat had been company enough. The average National boatman had a home ashore. The two men and two women even now aboard the *Sacarissa* in jammed together proximity — they had each other. (And even now, considering another definition of the verb *to have* and the possible permutations of two males and two females made him wiggle like a small boy who has to *go* —) There was always, to be sure, the Dating Game, played to its logical conclusion, for a fee, at any one of the several hotels in King Town, hard upon the sea. But as for any of the ladies accompanying him anywhere on his boat....

"*Whattt?* You tink I ahm crazy? *Nut*ting like *dot!*"

Boats were gritty with sand to fill the boggy yards and lanes, smelly with fish. Boats had *no* connotations of romance.

Such brief affairs did something for his prostate gland ("Changing the acid," the English called it), but nothing whatsoever, he now realized, for his loneliness. Nor did conversation in the boatmen's bars, lately largely on the theme of, "New tax law, rum go up to 15¢ a glass, man!"

And so here he was, fifty miles

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from home, if King Town was "home" — and if the *Sacarissa* was home ... well, who knew? St. Michael of the Mountains still had some faint air of its days as a port-and-caravan city, but that air was now faint indeed. Here the Bayfolk (Black, White, Colored, and Clear) were outnumbered by Turks and 'Paniar's, and there were hardly any Arawack at all. (There seldom were, anywhere out of the sound and smell of the sea.) There were a lot of old wooden houses, two stories tall, with carved grillwork, lots of flowering plants, lots of hills: perhaps looking up and down the hilly lanes gave the prospects more quaintness and interest, perhaps even beauty, than they might have had, were they as level as the lanes of King Town, Port Cockatoo, Port Caroline, or Lime Walk. And, too, there were the mountains all about, all beautiful. And there was the Ningoon River, flowing round about the town in easy coils, all lovely, too: its name, though Indian in origin, allowing for any number of easy, Spanish-based puns:

"Suppose you drink de wat-tah here, sah, you *cahn-not* stay away!"

"*En otros paises, señor, otros lugares, dicen* mañana. *Pero, por acá, señor, se dice* ningun!"

And so forth.

Limekiller had perambulated every street and lane, had circumambulated town. Like every town and the one sole city in British Hidalgo, St. Michael's had no suburbs. It was clustered thickly, with scarcely even a vacant lot, and where it stopped being the Town of St. Michael of the Mountains, it stopped. Abruptly. *Here* was the Incorporation; *there* were the farms and fields; about a mile outside the circumambient bush began again.

He could scarcely beat every tree, knock on every door. He was too shy to buttonhole people, ask if they had seen a knockout redhead. So he walked. And he looked. And he listened. But he heard no women's voices, speaking with accent from north of the northern border of Mexico. Finally he grew a little less circumspect.

To Mr. John Paul Peterson, Prop., the Emerging Nation Bar and Club:

"Say.... Are there any other North Americans here in town?"

As though Limekiller had pressed a button, Mr. Peterson, who until that moment had been only amiable, scowled an infuriated scowl and burst out, "What the Hell they want come *here* for? You think them people *crazy?* They got richest countries in the world, which they take good care *keep* it that way; so why the Hell they want come *here?* Leave me ask you one question. Turn you head all round. You see them table? You see them booth? How many people you see

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sitting and drinking at them table and them booth?"

Limekiller's eyes scanned the room. The question was rhetorical. He sighed. "No one," he said, turning back to his glass.

Mr. Peterson smote the bar with his hand. "Exactly!" he cried. *"No one!* You not bloody damn fool, boy. You have good eye in you head. *Why* you see no one? Because no one can afford come here and drink, is why you see no one. People can scarce afford *eat!* Flour cost nine cent! Rice cost fif*teen* cent! Lard cost thirty-*four* cent! Brown sugar at nine cent and white sugar at eleven! D.D. milk, twen-ty-one cent! And yet the tax going *up*, boy! The tax going *up!*"

A line stirred in Limekiller's mind. "Yes — and, 'Pretty soon *rum* going to cost fifteen cents,'" he repeated. Then had the feeling that (in that case) something was wrong with the change from his two-shillings piece. And with his having made this quotation.

"What you mean, *'fifteen cent'?"* demanded Mr. Peterson, in a towering rage. Literally, in a towering rage; he had been slumped on his backless chair behind the bar, now stood up to his full height ... and it was a height, too. *"Whattt?* 'Fif-*teen*-cent?' You think this some damn dirty liquor booth off in the bush, boy? You think you got *swampy,"* referring to backwoods distilled goods, "in you glass? What *'fifteen cent?'* No such *thing.* You got pure Governor Morgan in you glass, boy, never cost less than one shilling, and pretty soon going to be thirty cent, boy: thir-ty-*cent!* And for what? For the Queen can powder her nose with the extra five penny, boy?" Et cetera. Et cetera.

Edwin Rodney Augustine Bickerstaff, Royal British Hidalgo Police (sitting bolt-upright in his crisp uniform beneath a half-length photograph of the Queen's Own Majesty):

"Good afternoon, sir. May I help you, sir?"

"Uh ... yes! I was wondering ... uh ... do you know if there are any North Americans in town?"

Police-sergeant Bickerstaff pondered the question, rubbed his long chin. "Any *North* Americans, you say, sir?"

Limekiller felt obliged to define his terms. "Any Canadians or people from the States."

Police-sergeant Bickerstaff nodded vigorously. "Ah, now I understand you, sir. Well. That would be a matter for the Immigration Officer, wouldn't you agree, sir?"

"Why ... I suppose. Is *he* in right now?" This was turning out to be more complex than he had imagined.

"Yes, sir. He *is* in. *Un*officially speaking, he is in. *I* am the police officer charged with the duties of

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Immigration Officer in the Mountains District, sir."

"Well —"

"Three to four, sir."

Limekiller blinked. Begged his pardon. The police-sergeant smiled slightly. "Every evening from three to four, sir, pleased to execute the duties of Immigration Officer, sir. At the present time," he glanced at the enormous clock on the wall, with just a touch of implied proof, "I am carrying out my official duties as Customs Officer. *Have you anything to declare?"*

And, *So much for* that *suggestion,* Limekiller thought, a feeling of having only slightly been saved from having made a fool of himself tangible in the form of something warmer than sunshine round about his face and neck.

The middle-aged woman at the Yohan Yohanoglu General Mdse. Establishment store sold him a small bar of Fry's chocolate, miraculously unmelted. Jack asked, "Is there another hotel in town, besides the Grand?"

A touch of something like hauteur came over the still-handsome face of *Sra.* Yohanoglu. "Best you ahsk wan of the men," she said. And, which one of the men? *"Any men,"* said she.

So. Out into the sun-baked street went lonely Limekiller. Not that lonely at the moment, though, to want to find where the local hookers hung out. Gone too far to turn back. And, besides, turn back to *what?*

The next place along the street which was open was the El Dorado Club and Dancing (its sign, slightly uneven, said).

Someone large and burly thumped in just before he did, leaned heavily on the bar, "How much, *rum?"* he demanded.

The barkeep, a 'Paniard, maybe only one-quarter Indian (most of the Spanish-speaking Hidalgans were more than that), gave a slight yawn at this sudden access of trade. "Still only wan dime," he said. "Lahng as dees borrel lahst. When necessitate we broach nudder borrel, under new tox lah, *iay! Pobre cito! Going be fifteen cent!"*

"!En el nombre del Queen!" proclaimed the other new customer, making the sign of the cross, then gesturing for a glass to be splashed.

Limekiller made the same gesture.

"What you vex weed de Queen *varón?"* the barkeeper asked, pouring two fingers of "clear" into each glass. "You got new road, meb-be ah beet bum-py, but *new;* you got new wing on hospital, you got new generator for give ahl night, electricity: *whattt?* You teenk you hahve ahl dees, ahn not pay ah new tox? No sotch teeng!"

"No me hace falta, 'ahl dees,'" said the other customer. *"Resido en*

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el bush, where no hahv not-ting like dot."

The barkeep yawned again. "*Reside en el* bush? Why you not live like old-time people? Dey not dreenk rum. Dey not smoke cigarette. Dey not use lahmp-*ile.* Ahn dey not pay toxes, not dem, no."

"Me no want leev like dot. *Whattt?* You cahl dot 'leev'?" He emptied his glass with a swallow, dismissed any suggestion that Walden Pond and its tax-free amenities might be his for the taking, turned to Limekiller his vast Afro-Indian face. "Filiberto Marín, señor, is de mahn to answer stranger question. Becahs God *love* de stranger, senor, ahn Filiberto Marín love *God.* Everybody know Filiberto Marín, ahn if anyone want know where he is, I am de mahn." Limekiller, having indeed questions, or at any rate, A Question, Limekiller opened his mouth.

But he was not to get off so easily. There followed a long, *long* conversation, or monologue, on various subjects, of which Filiberto Marín was the principle one. Filiberto Marín had once worked one entire year in the bush and was only home for a total of thirty-two days, a matter (he assured Jack) of public record. Filiberto Marín was born just over the line in Spanish Hidalgo, his mother being a Spanish Woman and his father a British Subject By Birth. Had helped build a canal, or perhaps it was *The* Canal. Had been in Spanish Hidalgo at the time of the next-to-last major revolution, during which he and his sweetheart had absquatulated for a more peaceful realm. Married *in church!* Filiberto Marín and his wife had produced one half a battalion for the British Queen! "Fifteen children — and *puros varónes!* Ahl son, señor! So fahst we have children! Sixty-two year old, and work more tasks one day dan any young man! An I now desires to explain we hunting and fishing to you, becahs you stranger here, so you ignorance not you fahlt, señor."

Limekiller kept his eyes in the mirror, which reflected the passing scene through the open door, and ordered two more low-tax rums; while Filiberto Marin told him how to cast nets with weights to catch mullet in the lagoons, they not having the right mouths to take hooks; how to catch turtle, the *tortuga blanca* and the striped turtle (the latter not being popular locally because it was striped) —

"What difference does the stripe mean, Don Filiberto?"

"*¡Seguro!* Exoctly!!" beamed Don Filiberto, and, never pausing, swept on: how to use raw beef and fresh beef skin to bait lobsters ("Dey cahl him *lobster,* but is really de *langusta,* child of de crayfish."), how to tell the difference in color

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between saltwater and freshwater ones, how to fix a dory, how to catch tortuga "by dive for him —"

"— You want to know how to cotch croc-o-*dile* by dive for him? Who can tell you? Filiberto Marin will answer dose question," he said, and he shook Limekiller's hand with an awesome shake.

There seemed nothing boastful about the man. Evidently Filiberto Marín *did* know all these things and, out of a pure and disinterested desire to help a stranger, wanted merely to put his extensive knowledge at Jack's disposal....

Of this much, Limekiller was quite clear the next day. He was far from clear, though, as to how he came to get there in the bush where many cheerful dark people were grilling strips of *barbacoa* over glowing coals — mutton it was, with a taste reminiscent of the best old-fashioned bacon, plus ... well, *mutton.* He did not remember having later gone to bed, let alone to sleep. Nor know the man who came and stood at the foot of his bed, an elderly man with a sharp face which might have been cut out of ivory ... this man had a long stick ... a spear? ... no....

Then Limekiller was on his feet. In the moon-speckled darkness he could see very little, certainly not another man. There was no lamp lit. He could hear someone breathing regularly, peacefully, nearby. He could hear water purling, not far off. After a moment, now able to see well enough, he made his way out of the cabin and along a wooden walkway. There was the Ningoon River below. A fine spray of rain began to fall; the river in the moonlight moved like watered silk. *What* had the man said to him? Something about showing him ... showing him *what?* He could not recall at all. There had really been nothing menacing about the old man.

But neither had there been anything reassuring.

Jack made his way back into the cabin. The walls let the moonlight in, and the fine rain, too. But not so much of either as to prevent his falling asleep again.

Next day, passion — well, that was not exactly the right word — but what was? Infatuation? Scarcely even that. An uncommon interest in, plus a great desire for, an uncommonly comely young woman who also spoke his own language with familiar, or familiar enough, accents — oh, well — Hell! — whatever the *word* was, whatever his own state of mind had been, next morning had given way to something more like common sense. Common sense, then, told him that if the young woman (vaguely he amended this to the young women) had intended to

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come to St. Michael of the Mountains to stay at a hotel ... or wherever it was, which they thought might take a reservation ... had even considered *writing* for the reservation, well, they had not intended to come here at once. In other words: enthusiasm (*that* was the word! ... damn it ...) enthusiasm had made him arrive early.

So, since he was already *there,* he might as well relax and enjoy it.

— He was already *where?*

Filiberto Marín plunged his hands into the river and was noisily splashing water onto his soapy face. Jack paused in the act of doing the same thing for himself, waited till his host had become a trifle less audible — *how* the man could snort! — "Don Fili, what is the name of this place?"

Don Fili beamed at him, reached for the towel. "These place?" He waved his broad hand to include the broad river and the broad clearing, with its scattered fields and cabins. "These place, Jock, *se llame* Pahrot Bend. You like reside here? Tell me, just. I build you house." He buried his face in his towel. Jack had no doubt that the man meant exactly what he said, gave another look around to see what was being so openhandedly — and openheartedly — offered him; this time he looked across to the other bank. Great boles of trees: Immense! Immense! The eye grew lost and dizzy gazing upward toward the lofty, distant crowns. Suddenly a flock of parrots, yellowheads, flew shrieking round and round; then vanished.

Was it some kind of an omen? *Any* kind of an omen? To live here would not be to live just anywhere. He thought of the piss-soaked bogs which made up too large a part of the slums of King Town, wondered how anybody could live *there* when anybody could live *here.* But *here* was simply too far from the sea, and it was to live upon the sun-warm sea that he had come to this small country, so far from his vast own one. Still ... might not be such a bad idea ... well, not to *live* here all the time. But ... a smaller version of the not-very-large cabins of the hamlet ... a sort of country home ... as it were ... ha-ha ... well, why not? Something to think about ... anyway.

"Crahs de river, be one nice spot for build you *cabanita,*" said Don Filiberto, reading his mind.

"Mmm ... what might it cost?" he could not help asking, even though knowing whatever answer he might receive would almost certainly not in the long run prove accurate.

"Cahst?" Filiberto Marín, pulling his shirt over his huge dark torso, considered. Cost, clearly, was not a matter of daily concern. Calculations muttering from his

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mouth, living and audible thoughts, struggling to take form: "Cahst ... May-*be,* ooohhh, say-*be* torty dollar?"

"Forty dollars?"

Don Filiberto started to shake his head, reconsidered. "I suppose may-*be.* Not take lahng. May-be one hahf day, collect wild cane for make wall, bay *leaf* for make *techo,* roof. An may-be 'nother hahf day for put everything togedder. Cahst? So: Twenty dollar. Torty dollar. An ten dollar *rum!* Most eeem-portont!" He laughed. Rum! The oil which lubricates the neighbors' labors. A house-raising bee, Hidalgo style.

"And the land itself? The cost of the land?"

But Don Fili was done with figures. "What 'cahst of de lond'? Lond not cahst nah-ting. Lond belahng to Pike Es-tate."

A bell went ding-a-ling in Limekiller's ear. The Pike Estate. The great Pike Estate Case was the Jarndyce vs. Jarndyce of British Hidalgo. Half the lawyers in the colony lived off it. Was there a valid will? Were there valid heirs? Had old Pike died intestate? *¿Quien sabe?* There were barroom barristers would talk your ears off about the First Codicil and the Second Codicil and the Alleged Statement of Intention and the Holograph Document and all the rest of it. Limekiller had heard enough about the Pike Estate Case. He followed after Don Fili up the bank. Ah, but—

"Well, maybe nobody would bother me *now* if I had a cabin built there. But what about when the estate is finally settled?"

Marín waved an arm, as impatiently as his vast good nature would allow. "By dot time, *hijo mio,* what you care? You no hahv Squatter Rights by den? Meb-*be* you *dead* by den!"

Mrs. Don Filiberto, part American Indian, part East Indian, and altogether Amiable and Fat, was already fanning the coals on the raised fire-hearth for breakfast.

Nobody was boating back to town then, although earnest guarantees were offered that "by and by somebody" would *be* boating back, for sure. Limekiller knew such sureties. He knew, too, that he might certainly stay on with the Marín family at Parrot Bend until then — and longer — and be fully welcome. But he had after all come to "Mountains" for something else besides rural hospitality along the Ningoon River (a former Commissioner of Historical Sites and Antiquities had argued that the name came from an Indian word, or words, meaning Region of Bounteous Plenty; local Indians asserted that a more literal and less literary translation would be Big Wet). The

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fine rain of the night before began to fall again as he walked along, and soon he was soaked.

It did not bother him. By the time he got back into town the sun would have come out and dried him. Nobody bothered with oilskins or mackintoshes on the Bay of Hidalgo, nor did he intend to worry about his lack of them here in the Mountains of Saint Michael Archangel and Prince of Israel.

Along the road (to give it its courtesy title) he saw a beautiful flurry of white birds — were they indeed cattle egrets? living in symbiosis, or commensality, with the cattle? was one, indeed, heavy with egg, "blown over from Africa"? Whatever their name or origin, they did follow the kine around, heads bobbing as they, presumably, ate the insects the heavy cloven hooves stirred up. But what did the *cattle* get out of it? Company?

The rain stopped, sure enough.

It was a beautiful river, with clear water, green and bending banks. He wondered how high the highest flood waters came. A "top gallon flood," they called that. Was there a hint of an old tradition that the highest floods would come as high as the topgallant sails of a ship? Maybe.

The rain began again. Oh, well.

An oilcloth serving as door of a tiny cabin was hauled aside and an old woman appeared and gazed anxiously at Jack. "Oh, sah, why you wahk around in dis eager rain?" she cried at him. "Best you come in, *bide,* till eet *stop!*"

He laughed. "It doesn't seem all that eager to me, Grandy," he said, "but thank you anyway."

In a little while it had stopped. *See?*

Further on, a small girl under a tree called, "Oh, see what beauty harse, meester!"

Limekiller looked. Several horses were coming from a stable and down the path to the river; they were indeed beautiful, and several men were discussing a sad story of how the malfeasance of a jockey (evidently not present) had lost first place in a recent race for one of them to the famous Tigre Rojo, the Red Tiger, of which even Limekiller, not a racing buff, had heard.

"Bloody b'y just raggedy-ahss about wid him, an so Rojo win by just a nose. Son of a beach!" said one of the men, evidently the trainer of *the* beauty horse, a big bay.

"— otherwise he beat any harse in British Hidalgo!"

"Oh, yes! Oh, yes, Mr. Ruy! — dot he would!"

Ruy, his dark face enflamed by the memory of the loss, grew darker as he watched, cried, "Goddammit, oh Laard Jesus Christ, b'y! Lead him by de *head* till he *in* de wahter, *den* lead him by rope! When you goin to learn? — an watch out for

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boulder! — you know what one bloody fool mon want me to do? Want me to *run* harse dis marnin — not even just canter, he want *run* him! — No, *no*, b'y, just let him swim about be de best ting for him —

"Dis one harse no common harse — dis one harse foal by *Garobo*, from Mr. Pike *stud!* Just let him swim about, I say!"

The boy in the water continued, perhaps wisely, to say nothing, but another man now said, "Oh, yes. An blow aht de cold aht of he's head, too."

Mr. Ruy grunted, then, surveying the larger scene and the graceful sweep of it, he said, gesturing, "I cotch plenty fish in dis river — catfish, twenty-pound tarpon, too. I got nylon *line*, but three week now, becahs of race, I have no time for cotch fish." And his face, which had gradually smoothed, now grew rough and fierce again. "Bloody dom fool jockey b'y purely ragged-dy-*ahss* around wid harse!" he cried. The other men sighed, shook their heads. Jack left them to their sorrow.

Here the river rolled through rolling pasture lands, green, with trees, some living and draped with vines, some dead and gaunt but still beautiful. The river passed a paddock of Brahma cattle like statues of weathered grey stone, beautiful as the trees they took the shade beneath, cattle with ears like leaf-shaped spearheads, with wattles and humps. Then came an even lovelier sight: black cattle in a green field with snow-white birds close by among them. Fat hogs, Barbados sheep, water meadows, sweet soft air.

He could see the higher roofs on the hills of the town, but the road seemed to go nowhere near there. Then along came a man who, despite his clearly having no nylon line, had — equally clearly — ample time to fish, carried his catch on a stick. "De toewn, sir? Straight acrahs de savannah, sir," he gestured. "is de road to toewn." And, giving his own interpretation to the text, *I will not let thee go unless thou bless me*, detained Limekiller with blessings of unsolicited information, mostly dealing with the former grandeur of St. Michael's Town, and concluding, "Yes, sir, in dose days hahv t'ree dahnce *hahll.* Twen-ty bar and club! Torkish Cat'edral w'open every day, sah — *every day!* — ahn ..." he groped for further evidences of the glorious days of the past, "ahn ah fot fowl, sah, cahst two, t'ree shilling!"

Sic transit gloria mundi.

The room at the hotel was large and bare, and contained a dresser with a clouded mirror, a chair, and a bed with a broad mattress covered in red "brocade;" the sheet, however, would not encompass it.

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This was standard: the sheet never *would,* except in the highest of high class hotels. And as one went down the scale of classes and the size of the beds diminished, so, proportionately, did the sheets: they were *always* too narrow and too short. Curious, the way this was always so. (In the famous, or infamous, Hotel Pelican in King Town, sheets were issued on application only, at an extra charge, for the beds were largely *pro forma.* The British soldiers of the Right Royal Regiment, who constituted the chief patrons, preferred to ignore the bed and used the *wall,* would you believe it, for their erotic revels. If that was quite the right word.)

There was a large mahogany wardrobe, called a "press" in the best Dickensian tradition, but there were no hangers in it. There was a large bathroom off the hall but no towels and no soap, and the urinal was definitely out of order, for it was tied up with brown paper and string and looked like a twelve-pound turkey ready for the oven.

But all these shortcomings were made up for, and more than made up for, by one thing which the Grand Hotel Arawack *did* have: out on the second-story verandah was a wide wooden-slatted swing of antique and heroic mold, the kind one used to see only at Auntie Mary's, deep in the interior of Prince Edward Island or other islands in time. — Did the Hiltons have wide wooden swings on their verandahs? Did the Hiltons have verandahs, for that matter?

Limekiller took his seat with rare pleasure: it was not every damned day that he could enjoy a nostalgia trip whilst at the same time rejoicing in an actual physical trip which was, really, giving him just as much pleasure. For a moment he stayed immobile. (Surely, Great-uncle Leicester was just barely out of sight, reading the Charlottetown newspaper, and damning the Dirty Grits?) Then he gave his long legs a push and was off.

Up! and the mountains displayed their slopes and foothills. *Down!* and the flowery lanes of town came into sight again. And, at the end of the lanes was the open square where stood the flagpole with the Union Jack and the National Ensign flapping in the scented breeze ... and, also, in sight, and well in sight (Limekiller had chosen well) was the concrete bench in front of which the bus from King Town had to disembogue its passengers. If they came by bus, and come by bus they must (he reasoned), being certainly tourists and not likely to try hitching. Also, the cost of a taxi for fifty miles was out of the reach of anyone but a land speculator. No, by *bus,* and there was where the bus would stop.

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"Let me help you with your bags," he heard himself saying, ready to slip shillings into the hands of any boys brash enough to make the same offer.

There was only one fly in the ointment of his pleasure.

Swing as he would and as long as he would, no bus came.

"Bus? *Bus,* sir? *No,* sir. Bus ahlready come orlier today. Goin bock in evening. Come ahgain tomorrow."

With just a taste of bitterness, Limekiller said, *"Mañana."*

"¡Ah, Vd. sí puede hablar en espanol, señor! Si-señor. Mañana viene el bus, otra vez. — Con el favor de Dios." An the creek don't rise, thought Limekiller.

Suddenly he was hungry. There was a restaurant in plain sight, with a bill of fare five feet tall painted on its outer wall: such menus were only there for, so to speak, authenticity. To prove that the place was indeed a restaurant. And not a cinema. Certainly no one would ever be able to order and obtain anything which was *not* painted on them. — Besides, the place was closed.

"Be open tonight, sir," said a passerby, observing him observing.

Jack grunted. "Think they'll *have* that tonight?" he asked, pointing at random to *Rost Muttons* and to *Beef Stakes.*

An emphatic shake of the head. *"No*-sir. Rice and beans."

Somewhere nearby someone was cooking something besides rice and beans. The passerby, noticing the stranger's blunt and sunburned nose twitch, with truly Christian kindness said, "But Tía Sani be open now."

"Tía Sani?"

"Yes-sir. Miss Sanita. Aunt Sue. Directly down de lane."

Tía Sani had no sign, no giant menu. However, Tía Sani was *open.*

Outside, the famous Swift Sunset of the Torpics dallied and dallied. There was no sense of urgency in Hidalgo, be it British or Spanish. There was the throb of the light-plant generator, getting ready for the night. Watchman, what of the night? — what put *that* into his mind? He swung the screen door, went in.

Miss Sani, evidently the trim grey little woman just now looking up towards him from her stove, did not have a single item of formica or plastic in her spotless place. Auntie Mary, back in P.E.I., would have approved. She addressed him in slow, sweet Spanish. "How may I serve you, sir?"

"What may I encounter for supper, señora?"

"We have, how do they call it in inglés, meat, milled, and formed together? !ah! los mitbols! And also a *caldo* of meat with macaroni and

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verdants. Of what quality the meat? Of beef, señor."

Of course it was cheap, filling, tasty, and good.

One rum afterwards in a club. There might have been more than one, but just as the thought began to form (like a mitbol), someone approached the jukebox and slipped a coin into its slot — the only part of it not protected by a chickenwire cage against violent displays of dislike for whatever choice someone else might make. The management had been wise. At once, NOISE, slightly tinctured with music, filled the room. Glasses rattled on the bar. Limekiller winced, went out into the soft night.

Suddenly he felt sleepy. Whatever was there tonight would be there tomorrow night. He went back to his room, switched the sheet so that at least his head and torso would have its modest benefits, thumped the lumpy floc pillow until convinced of its being a hopeless task, and stretched out for slumber.

The ivory was tanned with age. The sharp face seemed a touch annoyed. The elder man did not exactly *threaten* Limekiller with his pole or spear, but ... and why *should* Limekiller get up and go? Go *where?* For *what?* He had paid for his room, hadn't he? He wanted to sleep, didn't he? And he was damned well *going* to sleep, too. If old what's-his-name would only let him ... off on soft green clouds he drifted. *Up* the river. *Down* the river. Old man smiled, slightly. And up the soft green mountains. Old man was frowning, now. Old man was —

"Will you get the Hell *out* of here?" Limekiller shouted, bolt upright in bed. — poking him with that damned —

The old man was gone. The hotel maid was there. She was poking him with the stick of her broom. The light was on in the hall. He stared, feeling stupid and slow and confused. "Eh —?"

"You have bad *dream,*" the woman said.

No doubt, he thought. Only —

"Uh, thanks. I — uh. Why did you poke me with the broomstick? And not just shake me?"

She snorted. "*Whattt?* You theenk I want *cotch* eet?"

He still stared. She smiled, slightly. *He* smiled, slightly, too. "Are bad dreams contagious, then?" he asked.

She nodded, solemnly, surprised that he should ask.

"Oh. Well, uh, then ... then how about helping me have some *good* ones?" He took her, gently, by the hand. And, gently, pulled. She pulled her hand away. Gently. Walked towards the open door. Closed it.

Returned.

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"Ahl right," she said. "We help each other." And she laughed.

He heard her getting up, in the cool of the early day. And he moved towards her, in body and speech. And fell at once asleep again.

Later, still early, he heard her singing as she swept the hall, with, almost certainly, that same broom. He burst out and cheerfully grabbed at her. Only, it wasn't her. "What you want?" the woman asked. Older, stouter. Looking at him in mild surprise, but with no dislike or disapproval.

"Oh, I, uh, are, ah. Ha-ha. Hmm. Where is the other lady? Here last night? Works here?" He hadn't worded that as tactfully as he might have. But it didn't seem to matter.

"She? She not work here. She come help out for just one night. Becahs my sister, lahst night, she hahv wan lee pickney — gorl *beh*-bee. So I go ahn she stay." The pronouns were a bit prolix, but the meaning was clear. "Now she go bock. Becahs truck fah go Macaw Falls di *leave,* señor." And, as she looked at the play of expression on his face, the woman burst into hearty, good-willed laughter. And bounced down the hall, still chuckling, vigorously plying her besom.

Oh, *well.*

And they *had* been *good* dreams, too.

Tía Sani was open. Breakfast: two fried eggs, buttered toast of thick-sliced home-baked bread, beans (mashed), tea with tinned milk, orange juice. Cost: $1.00, National Currency — say, 60¢, 65¢, US or Canadian. On the wall, benignly approving, the Queen, in her gown, her tiara, and her Smile of State; also, the National Premier, in open shirt, eyeglasses, and a much broader smile.

Jack found himself still waiting for the bus. *Despite* the Night Before. See (he told himself), so it *isn't* Just Sex.... Also waiting, besides the retired chicle-tappers and superannuated mahogany-cutters, all of them authorized bench-sitters, was a younger and brisker man.

"You are waiting for the bus, I take it," he now said.

"Oh, yes. Yes, I am."

And so was *he.* "I am expecting a repair part for my tractor. Because, beside my shop, I have a farm. You see my shop?" He companionably took Limekiller by the arm, pointed to a pink-washed building with the indispensable red-painted corrugated iron roof (indispensable because the rains rolled off them and into immense wooden cisterns) and overhanging gallery. "Well, I find that I cannot wait any longer, Captain Sneed is watching the shop for me, so I would like to ahsk you one favor. *If* you are here. *If* the bus comes.

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Would you be so kind as to give me a hail?"

Limekiller said, "Of course. Be glad to," suddenly realized that he had, after all, other hopes for *If* The Bus Come; hastily added, "And if not, I will send someone to hail you."

The dark (but not *local*-dark) keen face was split by a warm smile. "Yes, do. — Tony Mikeloglu," he added, giving Jack's hand a hearty, hasty shake; strode away. (Tony Mikeloglu could trust Captain Sneed not to pop anything under his shirt, not to raid the till, not to get too suddenly and soddenly drunk and smash the glass goods. But, suppose some junior customer were to appear during the owner's absence and, the order being added up and its price announced, pronounce the well-known words, *Ma say, "write eet doewn"* — could he trust Captain Sneed to demand cash and not "write it down?" — no, he could *not.*)

Long Limekiller waited, soft talk floating on around him, of old-time "rounds" of sapodilla trees and tapping them for chicle, talk of "hunting" — that is, of climbing the tallest hills and scouting out for the tell-tale reddish sheen which mean mahogany — talk of the bush camps and the high-jinks when the seasons were over. But for them, now, all seasons were over, and it was only that: talk. Great-uncle Leicester had talked a lot, too; only *his* had been other trees, elsewhere.

Still, no bus.

Presently he became aware of feeling somewhat ill at ease, he could not say why. He pulled his long fair beard, and scowled.

One of the aged veterans said, softly, "Sir, de mon *hail*ing you."

With an effort, Limekiller focused his eyes. There. There in front of the pink store building. Someone in the street, calling, beckoning.

"De *Tork* hailing you, sir. Best go see what he want."

Tony Mikeloglu wanted to tell him something? Limekiller, with long strides strolled down to see. "I did not wish to allow you to remain standing in the sun, sir. I am afraid I did not ask your name. Mr. Limekiller? — Interesting name. Ah. Yes. My brother-in-laws' brother has just telephoned me from King *Town,* Mr. Limekiller. I am afraid that the bus is not coming today/Break*down?*"

Under his breath, Limekiller muttered something coarse and disappointed.

"Pit-ty about the railroad," a deep voice said, from inside the store. "Klondike to Cape Horn. Excellent idea. Vi-sion. But they never built it. Pit-ty."

Limekiller shifted from one foot to another. Half, he would go back

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to the hotel. Half, he would go somewhere else. (They, she, no one was coming. What did it matter?) *Any*where. *Where?* But the problem was swiftly solved. Once again, and again without offense, the merchant took him by the arm. "Do not stand outside in the sun, sir. Do come *in*side the shop. In the shade. And have something cold to drink." And by this time Jack was already there. "Do you know Captain Sneed?"

Small, khaki-clad, scarlet-faced. Sitting at the counter, which was serving as an unofficial bar. "I suppose you must have often wondered," said Captain Sneed, in a quarterdeck voice, "why the Spaniard didn't settle British Hidalgo when he'd settled everywhere *else* round about?"

"— Well —"

"Didn't know it was *here,* Old Boy! Couldn't have gotten here if he *did,* you see. First of all," he said, drawing on the counter with his finger dipped in the water which had distilled from his glass (Tony now sliding another glass, tinkling with, could it be? — yes, it was! Ice! — over to Jack, who nodded true thanks, sipped) — "First of all, you see, coming from east to west, there's Pharaoh's Reef — quite enough to make them sheer off south in a bit of a damned hurry, don't you see. Then there's the Anne of Denmark Island's Reef, even bigger! And suppose they'd *sailed* south to avoid Anne of Denmark Island's Reef? Eh? What would they find, will you tell me that?"

"Carpenter's Reef ... unless it's been moved," said Jack.

Sneed gave a great snort, went on, *"Exactly!* Well, then. — Now, even if they'd missed Pharaoh's Reef and got pahst it ... even if they'd missed Anne of Denmark Island's Reef and got pahst it ... even if they'd missed Carpenter's Reef and got pahst *it* ... why, then there's that great long *Barrier* Reef, don't you see, one of the biggest in the world. (Of course, Australia's the biggest one ...) No. No, Old Boy. Only the British lads knew the way through the Reef, and you may be sure that *they* were not pahssing out the information to the Spaniard, no, ho-ho!"

Well (thought Jack, in the grateful shade of the shop), maybe so. It was an impressive thought, that, of infinite millions of coral polyps laboring and dying and depositing their stony "bones" in order to protect British Hidalgo (and, incidentally, though elsewhere, Australia) from "the Spaniard."

"Well!" Captain Sneed obliterated his watery map with a sweep of his hand. "Mustn't mind *me,* Old Boy. This is my own King Charles's head, if you want to know. It's just

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the damnable *cheek* of those Spaniards there, *there,* in Spanish Hidalgo, still claiming this blessed little land of ours as their own, when they had never even set their *foot* upon it!" And he blew out his scarlet face and actually said, "Herrumph!" — a word which Jack had often seen but never, till now, actually heard.

And then Tony Mikeloglu, who had evidently gone through all, all of this many, many times before, said, softly, "My brother-in-law's brother has just told me on the telephone from King *Town* —"

"Phantom relay, it has — the telephone, you know — sorry, Tony, forgive me — what does your damned crook of a kinsman tell you from King Town?"

"... tells me that there is a rumor that the Pike Estate has finally been settled, you know."

Not *again? Always* ... thought Limekiller.

But Captain Sneed said, Don't you believe it! "Oh. What? 'A rumor,' yes, well, you may believe *that.* Always a rumor. Why didn't the damned fellow make a proper will? Eh? For that matter, why don't *you,* Old Christopher?"

There was a sound more like a crackle of cellophane than anything else. Jack turned to look; there in an especially shadowy corner was a man even older, even smaller, than Captain Sneed; and exposed toothless gums as he chuckled.

"Yes, why you do not, Uncle Christopher?" asked Tony.

In the voice of a cricket who has learned to speak English with a strong Turkish accent, Uncle Christopher said that he didn't believe in wills.

"What's going to become of all your damned doubloons, then, when you go pop?" asked Captain Sneed. Uncle Christopher only smirked and shrugged. "Where have you concealed all that damned money which you accumulated all those years you used to peddle bad rum and rusty roast-beef tins round about the bush camps? Who's going to get it all, eh?"

Uncle Christopher went *hickle-hickle.* "I know who going get it," he said. *Sh'sh sh'sh sh'sh.* His shoulders, thin as a butterfly's bones, heaved his amusement.

"Yes, but *how* are they going to get it? What? How are you going to take care of that? Once you're dead."

Uncle Christopher, with a concluding crackle, said, "I going do like the Indians do...."

Limekiller hadn't a clue what the old man meant, but evidently Captain Sneed had. "What?" demanded Captain Sneed. "Come now, come now, you don't really *believe* all that, do you? You *do?* You do! Tush. Piffle. The smoke of all those bush camps has addled your

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brains. Shame on you. Dirty old pagan. Disgusting. Do you call yourself a Christian and a member of a church holding the Apostolic Succession? *Stuff!*"

The amiable wrangle went on. And, losing interest in it, Limekiller once again became aware of feeling ill at ease. Or ... was it ... could it be? ... *ill?*

In came a child, a little girl; Limekiller had seen her before. She was perhaps eight years old. *Where* had he seen her?

"Ah," said Mikeloglu, briskly the merchant again. "Here is me best customer. She going make me rich, not true, me Bet-ty gyel? What fah you, *chaparita?*"

White rice and red beans were for her, and some coconut oil in her own bottle was for her, and some tea and some chile peppers (not very much of any of these items, though) and the inevitable tin of milk. (The chief difference between small shops and large shops in St. Michael's was that the large ones had a much larger selection of tinned milk.) Tony weighed and poured wrapped and tied. And looked at her expectantly.

She untied her handkerchief, knot by knot, and counted out the money. Dime by dime. Penny by penny. Gave them all a shy smile, left. "No fahget me when you rich, me Bet-ty gyel," Tony called after her. "Would you believe, Mr. Limekiller, she is one of the grand*children* of old Mr. Pike?"

"Then why isn't she rich already? Did the others get it all? — Oh. I forgot. Estate not settled."

Captain Sneed grunted. "Wouldn't help her even if the damned estate *were* settled. An outside child of an outside child. Couldn't inherit if the courts ever decide that he died intestate, and of course: no mention of her in any will ... if there *is* any will ..." *An outside child.* How well Jack knew that phrase by now. Marriage and giving in marriage was one thing in British Hidalgo; begetting and bearing of children, quite another thing. No necessary connection. "Do you have any children?" "Well, I has four children." Afterthought: "Ahnd t'ree oetside." Commonest thing in the world. Down here.

"What's wrong with you, Old Boy?" asked Captain Sneed. "You look quite dicky."

"Feel rotten," Limekiller muttered, suddenly aware of feeling so. "Bones all hurt."

Immediate murmurs of sympathy. And: "*Oh,* my. You weren't caught in that rain yesterday morning, were you?"

Jack considered. "Yesterday morning in the daytime. And ... before ... in the night time, too. — Why?"

Sneed was upset. "'*Why?*

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Why, when the rain comes down like that, from the north, at this time of year, they call it 'a fever rain' ..."

Ah. *That* was what the old woman had called out to him, urging him in out of the drizzle. *Bide,* she'd said. *Not* an "eager" rain — a *fever* rain!

"Some say that the rain makes the sanitary drains overflow. And some say that it raises the mosquitoes. *I* don't know. And some laugh at the old people, for saying that. But *I* don't laugh.... You're not laughing, either, are you? Well. What are we going to do for this man, Mik? Doctor *in*, right now?"

But the District Medical Officer was not in right now. It was his day to make the rounds in the bush hamlets in one half of the circuit. On one other day he would visit the other half. And in between, he was in town holding clinics, walking his wards in the hospital there on one of the hills, and attending to his private patients. Uncle Christopher produced from somewhere a weathered bottle of immense pills which he assured them were quinine, shook it and rattled it like some juju gourd as he prepared to pour them out.

But Captain Sneed demurred. "Best save that till we can be sure that it is malaria. Not they use quinine nowadays. Mmm. No chills, no fever? Mmm. Well. Let me see you to your room at the hotel." And he walked Limekiller back, saw him not only into his room but into his bed, called for "some decent sheets and some blankets, what sort of a kip are you running here, Antonoglu?" Antonoglu's mother, a very large woman in a dress as black and voluminous as the tents of Kedar, came waddling in with sighs and groans and applied her own remedy: a string of limes, to be worn around the neck. The maid aspersed the room with holy water.

"I shall go and speak to the pharmacist," Captain Sneed said, briskly. "What —?" For Limekiller, already feeling not merely rotten but *odd,* had beckoned to him. "Yes?"

Rotten, aching, odd or not, there was something that Limekiller wanted taken care of. "Would you ask anyone to check," he said, carefully. "To check the bus? The bus when it comes in. Two young ladies. One red-haired. When it comes in. Would you check. Ask anyone. Bus. Red-haired. Check. If no breakdown. Beautiful. Would you. Any. Please? Oh."

Captain Sneed and the others exchanged looks.

"Of course, Old Boy. Don't worry about it. All taken care of. Now." He had asked for something. It had not come. "What, not even a thermometer? *What?* Why, what do you *mean*, 'You had one but the

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children broke it'? *Get another one at once.* Do you wish to lose your license? Never mind. *I* shall get another one at once. *And* speak to the pharmacist. Antonoglu-*khanum,* the moment he begins to sweat, or his teeth chatter, *send me word.*

"Be back directly," he said, over his shoulder.

But he was not back directly.

Juan Antonoglu was presently called away to take care of some incoming guests from the lumber camps. He repeated Captain Sneed's words to his mother, who, in effect, told him not to tell her how to make yogurt. She was as dutiful as anyone could be, and, after a while, her widower son's children coming home, duty called her to start dinner. She repeated the instructions to the maid, whose name was Purificación. Purificación watched the sick man carefully. Then, his eyes remaining closed, she tiptoed out to look for something certain to be of help for him, namely a small booklet of devotions to the Señor de Esquipulas, whose cultus was very popular in her native republic. But it began to drizzle again: out she rushed to, first, get the clothes off the line and, second, to hang them up in the lower rear hall.

Limekiller was alone.

The mahogany press had been waiting for this. It now assumed its rightful shape, which was that of an elderly gentleman rather expensively dressed in clothes rather old-fashioned in cut, and, carrying a long... *something*... in one hand, came over to Jack's bed and looked at him most earnestly. Almost reproachfully. Giving him a hand to help him out of bed, in a very few moments he had Limekiller down the stairs and then, somehow, they were out on the river; and then... somehow ... they were *in* the river. No.

Not exactly.

Not at all.

They were *under* the river.

Odd.

Very odd.

A hundred veiled eyes looked at them.

Such a dim light. Not like anything familiar. Wavering. What was that. A crocodile. *I* am getting *out* of *here,* said Limekiller, beginning to sweat profusely. This was the signal for everyone to let Captain Sneed know. But nobody was there. Except Limekiller. And, of course, the old man.

And, of course, the crocodile.

And, it now became clear, *quite* a number of other creatures. All reptilian. Why was he not terrified, instead of being merely alarmed? He was in fact, now that he came to consider it, not even all that alarmed. The creatures were looking at him. But there was somehow nothing terrifying in this. It seemed quite all right for him to be there.

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The old man made that quite clear.

Quite clear.

"Is he delirious?" the redhead asked. Not just plain ordinary red. *Copper*-red.

"I don't have enough Spanish to know if saying *'barba amarilla'* means that you're delirious, or not. Are you delirious?" asked the other one. The Short. Brown hair. Plain ordinary brown.

"*'Barba amarilla'* means 'yellow beard,'" Limekiller explained. Carefully.

"Then you aren't delirious. I guess. — What does 'yellow beard' mean, in this context?"

But he could only shake his head.

"I mean, we can see that you do have a blond beard. Well, blond in *parts*. Is that your nickname? No."

Coppertop said, anxiously, "His pulse seems so *fun*ny, May!" She was the Long. So here they were. The Long and the Short of it. Them. He gave a sudden snort of laughter.

"An insane cackle if ever I heard one," said the Short. "Hm, *Hmm*. You're *right*, Felix. It *does* seem so funny. Mumping all *around* the place. — Oh, hello!"

Old Mrs. Antonoglu was steaming slowly down the lake, all the other vessels bobbing as her wake reached them. *Very* odd. Because it still *was* old Mrs. Antonoglu in her black dress and not really the old Lake Mickinuckee ferry boat. And this wasn't a lake. Or a river. They were all back in his room. And the steam was coming from something in her hand.

Where was the old man with the sharp face? Tan old man. Clear. Things were far from *clear*, but —

"What I bring," the old woman said, slowly and carefully and heavily, just the way in which she walked, "I bring 'im to drink for 'ealth, poor sick! Call the ... call the ... country *yerba*," she said, dismissing the missing words.

The red-haired Long said, "Oh, good!"

Spoon by bitter spoonful she fed it to him. Sticks of something. Boiled in water. A lot of it dribbled down his beard. "Felix," what an odd name. She wiped it carefully with kleenex.

"But 'Limekiller' is just as odd," he felt it only fair to point out.

"Yes," said the Short. "You certainly are. How did you know we were coming? We weren't sure, ourselves. *Nor* do we know you. Not that it matters. We are emancipated women. Ride bicycles. But we don't smoke cheroots, and we are *not* going to open an actuarial office with distempered walls, and the nature of Mrs. Warren's profession does not bother us in the least: in fact, we have thought, now and

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then, of entering it in a subordinate capacity. Probably *won't*, though. Still...."

Long giggled. Short said that the fact of her calling her Felix instead of *Felicia* shouldn't be allowed to give any wrong ideas. It was just that *Felicia* always sounded so goddamn silly. They were both talking at once. The sound was very comforting.

The current of the river carried them all off, and then it got so very still.

Quite early next morning.

Limekiller felt fine.

So he got up and got dressed. Someone, probably Purificón, had carefully washed his clothes and dried and ironed them. He hadn't imagined everything: there was the very large cup with the twigs of country *yerba* in it. He went downstairs in the early morning quiet, cocking an ear. Not even a cockcrow. Nor ... no ... it wasn't Killing Day at the abattoir. Not even a buzzard scrabbled on the iron roof. There on the hall table was the old record book used as a register. On the impulse, he opened it. Disappointment washed over him. *John L. Limekiller, sloop* Sacarissa, *out of King Town.* There were several names after that, all male, all ending in *-oglu*, and all from the various lumber camps round about in the back bush: Wild Hog Eddy, Funny Gal Hat, Garobo Stream....

Garobo.

Struck a faint echo. Too faint to bother with.

But no one named Felix. Or even *Felicia*. Or May.

Shite and onions.

There on the corner was someone.

"Lahvly morning," said someone. "Just come from hospital, seeing about the accident victims. Name is Pauls, George Pauls. Teach the Red Cross clahsses. British. You?"

"Jack Limekiller. Canadian. Have you seen two women, one a redhead?"

The Red Cross teacher *had* seen them, right there on that corner, but knew nothing more helpful than that. So, anyway, *that* hadn't been any delirium or dreams, either, *thank God.* (For how often had he not dreamed of fine friends and comely companions, only to wake and know that they had not been and would never be.)

At Tía Sani's. In came Captain Sneed. *"I say!* Terribly sorry! Shameful of me — I don't know how — Well. There'd been a motor accident, lorry overturned, eight people injured, so we all had to pitch in, there in hospital. — Ah, by the *way*. I *did* meet your young ladies, thought you'd imagined them, you know — District Engineer gave them a ride from King

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Town — I told them about you, went on up to hospital, then there was this damned accident — By the time we had taken care of them, poor chaps, fact is, I am *ashamed* to say, I'd forgotten all about you. — But you look all right, now." He scanned Limekiller closely. "Hm, still, you should see the doctor. I wonder...."

He walked back to the restaurant door, looked up the street, looked down the street. *"Doc-tor!* — Here he comes now."

In came a slender Eurasian man: the District Medical Officer himself. (Things were *always* happening like that in Hidalgo. Sometimes it was, "You should see the Premier. Ah, here he comes now. *Prem-ier!"*) The D.M.O. felt Limekiller's pulse, pulled down his lower eyelid, poked at spleen and liver, listened to an account of yesterday. Said, "Evidently you have had a brief though severe fever. Something like the one-day flu. Feeling all right now? Good. Well, eat your usual breakfast, and if you can't hold it down, come see me at my office."

And was gone.

"Where are they now? The young women, I mean."

Captain Sneed said that he was blessed if he knew, adding immediately, "Ah. Here they come now."

Both talking at once, they asked Jack if he felt all right, assured him that he looked well, said that they'd spent the night at Government Guest House (there was one of these in every out-district capital and was best not confused with *Government House,* which existed only in the colonial capital itself: the Royal Governor lived there, and he was not prepared to put up guests below the rank of, well, *Gov*ernor).

"Mr. Boyd arranged it. We met him in King Town. He was coming here anyway," said Felix, looking long and lovely. "He's an engineer. He's ... how would you describe him, May?"

"He's an engin*eer,*" May said.

Felix's sherry-colored eyes met Limekiller's. "Come and live on my boat with me and we will sail the Spanish Main together and I will tell you all about myself and frequently make love to you," he said at once. Out loud, however, all he could say was, "Uh ... thanks for wiping my beard last night ... uh...."

"Don't mention it," she said.

May said, "I want lots and lots of exotic foods for breakfast." She got two fried eggs, buttered toast of thick-sliced home-baked bread, beans (mashed), tea, orange juice. "There is nothing *like* these exotic foods," she said.

Felix got egg on her chin. Jack took his napkin and wiped. She said that turnabout was fair play. He said that one good turn deserv-

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ed another. She asked him if he had ever been to Kettle Point Lagoon, said by They to be beautiful. A spirit touched his lips with a glowing coal.

"I am going there today!" he exclaimed. He had never heard of it.

"Oh, good! Then we can all go together!"

Whom did he see as they walked towards the river, but Filiberto Marín. Who greeted him with glad cries, and a wink, evidently intended as compliments on Jack's company. "Don Fili, can you take us to Kettle Point Lagoon?"

Don Fili, who had at once begun to nod, stopped nodding. "Oh, Juanito, only wan mon hahv boat which go to Kettle Point Lagoon, ahn dot is Very Big Bakeman. He get so *vex,* do anybody else try for go dot side, none ahv we odder boatmen adventure do it. But I bring you to him. May-be he go today. *Veremos.*"

Very Big Bakeman, so-called to distinguish him from his cousin, Big Bakeman, was very big indeed. What he might be like when "vex," Limekiller (no squab himself) thought he would pass up knowing.

Bakeman's was the only tunnel boat in sight, probably the only one still in service. His answer was short. "Not before Torsday, becahs maybe not enough wah-teh get me boat ahcross de bar. *Tors*day," he concluded and, yawning, leaned back against the cabin. Monopolists the world over see no reason to prolong conversation with the public.

Felix said something which sounded like, "Oh, spit," but wasn't. Limekiller blinked. *Could* those lovely lips have uttered That Word? If so, he concluded without much difficulty, he would learn to like it. *Love* it. "Don Fili will take us to," he racked his brains, "somewhere just as interesting," he wound up with almost no pause. And looked at Don Fili, appealingly.

Filiberto Marín was equal to the occasion. "*Verdad.* In wan leetle while I going up de Right Branch. *Muy linda.* You will have pleasure. I telling Juanito about it, day before yesterday."

Limekiller recalled no such conversation, but he would have corroborated a deal with the devil, rather than let her out of his sight for a long while yet. He nodded knowingly. "Fascinating," he said.

"We'll get that nice lady to pack us a lunch."

Jack had a quick vision of Tía Sani packing them fried eggs, toast, beans, tea, and orange juice. But that nice lady fooled him. Her sandwiches were immense. Her eggs were deviled. She gave them *empenadas* and she gave them "crusts" — pastries with coconut

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and other sweet fillings — and then, behaving like aunts the whole world over, she ladled soup into a huge jar and capped it and handed it to Limekiller with the caution to hold it like *this* so that it didn't leak.... Not having any intention to have his hands thus occupied the whole trip, he lashed it and shimmed it securely in the stern of Marín's boat.

He had barely known that the Ningoon River *had* two branches. Parrot Bend was on the left one, then. The dory, or dugout, in use today was the largest he had seen so far. Captain Sneed at once decided it had room enough for him to come along, too. Jack was not overjoyed at first. The elderly Englishman was *a decent sort.* But he talked, damn it! *How* he talked. Before long, however, Limekiller found this in the old man's favor, for he talked to May, which left Felix alone to talk to Jack.

"John Lutwidge Limekiller," she said, having asked to see his inscribed watch. "there's a *name.* Beats Felicia Fox." *He* thought "fox" of all words in the world the most appropriate for her. He didn't say so. "— Why Lutwidge?"

"Lewis Carroll? Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, his real name? Distant cousin. Or so my Aunty Mary used to say."

This impressed her, anyway a little. "And what does Limekiller mean? How do you kill a lime? And *why?"*

"You take a limestone," he said, "and you burn it in a kil*n.* Often pronounced kill. Or, well, you *make* lime, for cement or whitewash or whatever, by burning stuff. Not just limestone. Marble. Oyster shells. Old orange rinds, maybe, *I* don't know, I've never done it. Family *name,"* he said.

She murmured, "I see...." She wound up her sleeves. He found himself staring, fascinated, at a blue vein in the inside of her arm near the bend. Caught her gaze. Cleared his throat, sought for something subject-changing and ever so interesting and novel to say. "Tell me about yourself," was what he found.

She gave a soft sigh, looked up at the high-borne trees. There was another blue vein, in her *neck,* this time. Woman was one mass of sexy *veins,* damn it! He would simply lean over and he would kiss — "Well, I was an Art Major at Harrison State U. and I said the Hell with it and May is my cousin and she wanted to go someplace, too, and so we're here.... Look at the *bridge!"*

They looked at its great shadow, at its reflection, broken by the passing boat into wavering fragments and ripples. The bridge loomed overhead, so high and so impressive in this remote place, one might for-

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get that its rotting road-planks, instead of being replaced, were merely covered with new ones ... or, at the least, newer ones. "In ten years," they heard Captain Sneed say, "the roadbed will be ten feet tall ... if it lasts that long."

May: "Be sure and let us know when it's going to fall and we'll come down and watch it. Ffff-*loppp!* — Like San Luis Rey."

"Like *whom*, my dear May?"

The river today was at middle strength: shallow-draft vessels could and still did navigate, but much dry shingle was visible near town. Impressions rushed in swiftly. The day was neither too warm nor too wet, the water so clear that Limekiller was convinced that he could walk across it. Felix lifted her hand, pointed in wordless wonder. There, on a far-outlying branch of a tree over the river was an absolutely monstrous lizard of a beautiful buff color; it could not have been less than five full feet from snout to end of tail, and the buff shaded into orange and into red along the spiky crenelations on the spiny back ridge. He had seen it before. *Had* he seen it before? He *had* seen it before.

"Iguana!" he cried.

Correction was polite but firm. "No, sir, Juanito. Iguana is *embra*, female. Dat wan be *macho*. Male. *Se llama 'garobo.'....*"

Something flickered in Limekiller's mind. "*¡Mira! Mira!* Dat wan dere, *she* be iguana!" And that one there, smaller than the buff dragon, was of a beautiful blue-green-slate-grey color. "Usual," said Filiberto, "*residen en* de bomboo t'icket, which is why de reason is call in English, 'Bomboo chicken'...."

"You *eat* it?" — Felix.

"Exotic *food*, exotic *food!*" — May.

"*Generalmente*, only de hine leg ahn de tail. But is very good to eat de she of dem when she have egg, because de egg so very nice eating, in May, June; but even noew, de she of dém have red egg, nice and hard. *Muy sabroso.*"

Jack turned and watched till the next bend hid the place from sight. After that he watched for them — he did not know why he watched for them, were they watching for *him?* — and he saw them at regular intervals, always in the topmost branches: immense. Why so high? Did they eat insects? And were there more insect to be taken, way up there? They surely did not eat *birds?* Some said, he now recalled in a vague way, that they ate only leaves; but were the top leaves so much more succulent? Besides, they seemed not to be eating anything at all, not a jaw moved. Questions perhaps not unanswerable, but, certainly, at the moment unanswered. Perhaps they had climbed

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so high only for the view: absurd.

"Didn't use to *be* so many of them, time was. — Eh, Fil?" asked Captain Sneed. ("Correct, Copitan. Not.") "Only in the pahst five, six years ... it seems. Don't *know* why...."

But whatever, it made the river even more like a scene in a baroque faëry tale, with dragons, or, at least, dragonets, looking and lurking in the gigant trees.

The bed of the river seemed predominantly rocky, with some stretches of sand. The river ran very sinuously, with banks tending towards the precipitate, and the east bank was generally the higher. "When river get high," explained Don Fili, "she get white, ahn come up to de crutch of dem tree —" he pointed to a fork high up. "It can rise in wan hour. Ahn if she rise in de night, we people cahn loose we boat. Very ... *peligroso* ... dangerous — *¡Jesus María!* Many stick tear loose wid roots ahn ahl, even big stick like dot wan," he pointed to another massy trunk.

Here and there was open land, *limpiado,* "cleaned," they said hereabouts, for "cleared." *"Clear* ..." Something flickered in Limekiller's mind as he recollected this. Then it flickered away. There seemed, he realized, feeling odd about it, that quite a lot of flickering was and had been going on his mind. Nothing that would come into focus, though. The scenes of this Right Branch, now: why did they persist in seeming ... almost ... familiar? ... when he had never been here before?

"What did you say just then, Don Fili?" he demanded, abruptly, not even knowing why he asked.

The monumental face half turned. *"¡Que?* What I just say, Juanito? Why ... I say, too bod I forget bring ahlong my fisga, my pike ... take some of dem iguana, garobo, cook dem fah you. — Fah *we,"* he amended, as one of the women said, *Gik.*

"We would say, 'harpoon'": Captain Sneed, judiciously. "Local term: 'pike.'"

The penny dropped. "Pike! Pike! It was a pike!" cried Limekiller. His body shook, suddenly, briefly. *Not* a lance or a spear. A pike!

They turned to look at him. Abashed, low-voiced, he muttered, "Sorry. Nothing. Something in a dream ..." Shock was succeeded by embarrassment.

Felix, also low-voiced, asked, "Are you feverish again?" He shook his head. Then he felt her hand take his. His heart bounced. Then — Oh. She was only feeling his pulse. Evidently it felt all right. She started to release the hand. He took hers. She let it stay.

Captain Sneed said, "Speaking of Pike. All this land, all of it, far as

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the eye can reach, is part of the Estate of the Late Leopold Albert Edward Pike, you know, of fame and story and, for the last five or six years, since he died, of in*termin*able litigation. He made a great deal of money, out of all these precious hardwoods, and he put it all back into land. —Did I know him? Of *course* I knew him! That is," he cleared his throat, "as well as *any*one knew him. Odd chap in a multitude of ways. *Damn*ably odd...."

Of course that was not the end of the subject.

"Mr. Pike, he *reetch*. But he no di *trust* bonks. He say, bonks di go *bust*, mon. People say he'm, nowah-days, bonks ahl *in*sure. Mr. Pike, he di say, Suh-pose *in*sure company di go bust, too? *¿Ai, como no?* Ahn he di say ah good word. He di say, 'Who shall guard de guards demselves?'"

Some one of the boatmen, who had theretofore said nothing, but silently plied his paddle, now spoke. "Dey say ... Meester Pike ... dey say, he *deal*...." And his voice dropped low on this last word. Something went through all the boatmen at that. It was not exactly a shudder. But it was *there*.

Sneed cleared his throat again as though he were going to cry *Stuff!* or *Piffle!* Though what he said was, "Hm, I wouldn't go *that* far. He was pagan enough not to believe in our Devil, let alone try to deal with him. He did, well, he did, you know, study things better left unstudied ... *my* opinion. Indian legends of a certain sort, things like that. Called it 'the *Old* Wisdom'...."

Limekiller found his tongue. "Was he an Englishman?"

The matter was considered; heads were shaken. "He mosely *Blanco*. He *lee* bit *Indio*. And he hahv some lee bit *Block* generation in he'm, too."

Sneed said, "His coloring was what they call in The Islands, *bright*. Light, in other words, you would say. Though color makes no difference here. Never *did*."

Marīn added, "What dey cahl Light, here we cahl Clear." He gestured towards shore, said, "Lime*stone*." Much of the bankside was composed of that one same sort of rock, grey-white and in great masses, with many holes and caves: limestone was susceptible to such water-caused decay. In Yucatan the water had corroded deep pits in it, immense deep wells and pools.

"Now, up ahead," said Captain Sneed, "towards the right bank of the river is a sort of cove called Crocodile Pool — No No, ladies, no need for alarm. Just stay in the boat. And almost directly opposite the cove, is what's called the Garobo Church; you'll see why."

Often in the savannahs they saw the white egrets with the orange

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bills, usually ashore amidst the cattle. Another kind of egret seemed to prefer the sand and gravel bars and the stumps or sawyers in midstream, and these were a distinctive shade of blue mixed with green, though lighter than the blue-green of the iguanas. Something like a blackbird took its perch and uttered a variety of long, sweet notes and calls.

Swallows skimmed and brighter colored birds darted and drank. And like great sentinels in livery, the great buff garobo-dragons peered down from the tall trees and the tall stones. Clouds of lemon-yellow and butter-yellow butterflies floated round the wild star-apples. *Here,* the stones lay in layers, like brickwork; *there,* the layers were warped and buckled, signs — perhaps — of some ancient strain or quake. But mostly, mostly, the stone rose and loomed and hung in bulbous worm-eaten masses. And over them, among them, behind them and between them, the tall cotton trees, the green-leaved cedars, the white-trunked Santa Maria, and the giant wild fig.

"Now, as to how you *catch* the crocodile," Captain Sneed answered an unasked question; "simple: one man stays in the dory and paddles her in a small circle, one or two men hold the *rope* —"

"— rope tie around odder mahn belly," Marín said.

"*Quite* so. And that chap *dives.* Machete in his *teeth.* And he ties up the croc and then he *tugs.* And then they haul them *up* ... you see. Simple."

Felix said, "Not *that* simple!"

May said, "Seems simple enough to me. Long as you've got a sound set of teeth."

Limekiller knew what was coming next. He had been here before. That was a mistake about his never having been here before, of course he had been here; never mind, Right Branch, Left Branch; or how else could he know? Down the steepy bluff a branch came falling with a crash of its *Crack!* falling with it; and the monstrous garobo hit the water with a tremendous sound and spray. It went *down* and it did not come up and it did not come *up.*

And then, distant but clear: the echo. And another echo. And — but that was too many echoes. Jack, who had been looking back, now turned. Spray was still flying up, falling down. *Ahead:* One after another the garobo were falling into the river. And then several at once, together. And then —

"Call *that,* 'The Garobo Church,'" said Captain Sneed.

That was an immense wild fig tree, hung out at an impossible angle; later, Limekiller was to learn that it had died of extreme age and of the storm which finally brought

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half of its roots out of the ground and forward into the water and canted it, thus, between heaven, earth, and river. It was a skeletal and spectral white against the green *green* of the bush. Three separate and distinct ecologies were along that great tangled length of great gaunt tree: at *least* three! — things crept and crawled, leaped and lurched or lay quiescent, grew and decayed, lived and multiplied and died — and the topmost branches belonged to the iguana and the garobo.

— That were now abandoning it, as men might abandon a threatened ship. Crash! Crash! Down they came, simply letting go and falling. *Crash!*

Sound and spray.

"Won't the crocodiles *eat* them?" cried Felix, tightening her hold on Jack's hand.

The boatmen, to whom this was clearly no new thing, all shook their heads, said No.

"Dey goin *wahrn* he'm, *el legarto,* dot we comin. So dot he no come oet. So cahn tehk *care. Horita el tiene cuidado.*"

"Tush," said Sneed. "Pif-fle. Damned reptiles are simply getting out of our way, *they* don't know that we haven't any pike. Damned old creepy-crawlies...."

Only the sound of their crashings, no other sound now. and Limekiller, saying in a calm flat voice, "Yes, of course," went out of his shirt and trousers and into the river.

He heard the men cry out, the women scream. But for one second only. Then the sounds muffled and died away. He was in the river. He saw a hundred eyes gazing at him. He swam, he felt bottom, he broke surface, he came up on his hands and knees. He did not try to stand. He was under the river. He was someplace else. Some place with a dim, suffused, wavering light. An odd place. A very odd place. With a very bad smell. He was alone. No, he was not. The garobo were all around and about him. The crocodile was very near up ahead of him. Something else was there, and he knew it had crawled there from the surface through a very narrow fissure. And some *thing* else was there. *That!* He had to take it and so he took it, wrenching it loose. It squilched, but it came. The crocodile gazed at him. The garobo moved aside for him. He backed away. He was in the water again. He —

"Into the *boat,* for Christ's sake!" old Sneed was shouting, his red face almost pale. The boatmen were reaching out to him, holding hands to be grasped by him, smacking the waters with their paddles and banging the paddles against the sides of the boat. The women looked like death. He gasp-

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ed, spat, trod water, held up something —

— then it was in the boat. Then, all grace gone, he was half in and half out of the boat, his skin scraping the hard sides of it, struggling, being pulled and tugged, wet skin slipping....

He was in the boat.

He leaned over the side, and, as they pulled and pressed, fearful of his going back again, he vomited into the waters.

Captain Sneed had never been so angry. "Well, what did you *expect* crocodile's den to smell like?" he demanded. "Attar of roses? Damndest foolishest crackbrainedest thing I ever saw —!"

Felix said, smoothing Jack's wet, wet hair, "*I* think it was *brave!*"

"You know nothing whatsoever about it, my dear child! — No, damn it, don't keep waving that damned old pipkin pot you managed to drag up, you damned Canuck! Seven hours under fire at Jutland, and I never had such an infernal shock, it was reckless, it was heedless, it was thoughtless, it was devil-may-care and a louse for the hangman; what was the *reason* for it, may I ask? To impress *whom?* Eh? *Me?* These good men? These young women? Why did you *do* it?"

All Limekiller could say was, "I dreamed that I had to."

Captain Sneed looked at him, mouth open. Then he said, almost in a mutter, "Oh, I say, poor old boy, he's still rambling, ill, *look*ed well enough, must have the *fever*...." He was a moment silent. Then he blinked, gaped; almost in a whisper, he asked, "You *dream*ed ... whom did you *see* in your dream?"

Limekiller shrugged. "Don't know who.... Oldish man. Sharp face. Tan. Old-fashioned clothes. Looked like a sort of a dandy, you might say."

And Captain Sneed's face, which had gone from scarlet to pink and then to scarlet again, now went muddy. They distinctly heard him swallow. Then he looked at the earthenware jar with its faded umber pattern. Then, his lips parting with a sort of dry smack: "... perhaps it *isn't* stuff and piffle, then...."

Ashore.

Sneed had insisted that the police be present. It was customary in Hidalgo to use the police in many ways not customary in the northern nations: to record business agreements, for instance, in places where there were no lawyers. And to witness. Sergeant Bickerstaff said that he agreed with Sneed. He said, also, that he had seen more than one old Indian jar opened and that when

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they were not empty they usually contained mud and that when they did not contain *mud* they usually contained "grahss-*seed*, cahrn-*ker*-nel, thing like that. Never find any gold in one, not before *my* eye, no, sirs and ladies. — But best you go ahead and open it."

The cover pried off, right-tight to the brim was a mass of dark and odorous substance, pronounced to be wild beeswax.

The last crumble of it evaded the knife, sank down into the small jar, which was evidently not filled but only plugged with it. They turned it upside down and the crumble of unbleached beeswax fell upon the table. And so did something else.

"Plastic," said May. "To think that the ancient Indians had invented plastic. Create a furor in academic circles. Invalidate God knows how many patents."

Sergeant Bickerstaff, unmoved by irony, said, "Best unwrop it, Coptain."

The plastic contained one dead wasp or similar insect, and two slips of paper. On one was written, in a firm old-fashioned hand, the words, *Page 36, Liber 100, Registers of Deeds of Gift, Mountains District.* The other was more complex. It seemed to be a diagram of sorts, and along the top and sides of it the same hand had written several sentences, beginning, *From the great rock behind Crocodile Cove and proceeding five hundred feet due North into the area called Richardson's Mahogany Lines....*

It was signed, *L.A.E. Pike.*

There was a silence. Then Felix said, not exactly jumping up and down, but almost, her loops of coppery hair giving a bounce, "A treasure map! Jack! Oh, *good!*"

So far as he could recall, she had never called him by name before. His heart echoed: *Oh, good!*

Captain Sneed, pondering, seemingly by no means entirely recovered from his several shocks, but recovered enough, said:

"Too late to go poking about in the bush, today. First thing tomorrow, get some men, some machetes, axes, shovels. — Eh?"

He turned to Police-sergeant Bickerstaff, who had spoken softly. And now repeated his words, still softly. But firmly. "First thing, sir. First thing supposed to be to notify the District Commissioner. Mister Jefferson Pike."

He was of course correct. As Captain Sneed agreed at once. Limekiller asked, "Any relation to the late Mr. Leopold Pike?"

Bickerstaff nodded. "He is a bahstard son of the late Mr. Leopold Pike." The qualifying adjective implied neither insult nor disrespect. He said it as calmly, as mildly, as if he had said step-son. Cousin. Uncle. It was merely a civil

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answer to a civil question. A point of identification had been raised, been settled.

D.C. Jefferson Pike was taller than his father had been, but the resemblance, once suggested, was evident. If any thoughts of an estate which he could never inherit were in his mind, they were not obvious. "Well, this is something new," was all his initial comment. Then, "I will ask my chief clark .... Roberts. Fetch us Liber 100, Register of Deeds of Gift. Oh, and see if they cannot bring some cups of tea for our visitors, please."

The tea was made and half drunk before Roberts, who did not look dilatory, returned, wiping dust and spiderwebs off the large old book. Which was now opened. Pages turned. "Well, well," said the District Commissioner. "This *is* something new!

"Don't know how they came to overlook *this*," he wondered. "The lawyers," he added. "*Who* registered it? Oh. Ahah. I see. Old Mr. Athelny; been dead *several* years. And always kept his own counsel, too. Quite proper. Well." He cleared his throat, began to read:

> I, Leopold Albert Edward Pike, Woodcutter and Timber Merchant, Retired, a resident of the Town of Saint Michael of the Mountains, Mountains District, in the Colony of British Hidalgo, and a British subject by birth ... do execute this Deed of Gift ... videlicet one collection of gold and silver coins, not being Coin of the Realm or Legal Tender, as follows, Item, one hundred pieces of eight reales, Item, fifty-five gold Lewises or louis d'or, Item ....

He read them all, the rich and rolling old names, the gold moidores and gold mohurs, the golden guineas, the silver byzants and all the rest, as calmly as though he were reading off an inventory of office suplies; came finally to:

> and all these and any others which by inadvertancy may not be herein listed which are found in the same place and location I do hereby give and devise to one Elizabeth Mendoza also known as Betty Mendoza a.k.a. Elizabeth Pike a.k.a. Betty Pike, an infant now resident in the aforesaid Mountains District, which Gift I make for good and sufficient reason and of my own mere whim and fancy ....

Here the D.C. paused, raised his eyes, looked at Captain Sneed. Who nodded. Said, "His own sound and voice. Yes. How *like* him!"

> ...and fancy; the aforesaid collection of gold and silver coins being secured in this same District in a place which I do not herein designate or describe other than to say that it be situ-

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ate on my own freehold lands in this same District. And if anyone attempt to resist or set aside this my Intention, I do herewith and hereafter declare that he, she or they shall not sleep well of nights.

After he had finished, there was a long pause. Then everybody began to talk at once. Then —

Sneed: Well, suppose we shall have to inform the lawyers, but don't see what *they* can do about it. Deed was executed whilst the old fellow was alive and has nothing to *do* with any question of the estate.

D.C. Pike: I quite agree with you. *Un*officially, of course. Officially, all I am to do is to make my report. The child? Why, yes, of course I know her. She is an outside child of my brother Harrison, who died even before the late Mr. Pike died. The late Mr. Pike seemed rather fond of her. The late Mr. Pike did, I believe, always give something to the child's old woman to keep her in clothes and find her food. As we ourselves have sometimes done, as best we could. But of course this will make a difference.

Sneed: As it *should.* As it *should.* He had put you big chaps to school and helped you make your own way in the world, but this was a mere babe. Do you suppose that he *knew* that such an estate was bound to be involved in litigation and that was why he tried to help the child with all this ... this *treasure* business?

Marín: Mis-tah Pike, he ahl-ways give ah lahf ahn he say, nobody gweyn molest *he* treasure, *seguro,* no, becahs he di set such watchies roun ah-bote eet as no mahn adventure fi trifle wid dey.

May: I can't help feeling that it's someone's cue to say, *'This all seems highly irregular'....*

Roberts, Chief Clerk (softly but firmly): Oh, no, Miss. The Stamp Tax was paid according to regulations, Miss. *Everything seems in regular order, Miss.*

Watchies. A "watchie" was a watchman, sometimes registered as a private constable, thus giving him ... Jack was not sure exactly what it gave him: except a certain status. But it was obviously that this was not what "the late Mr. Pike" had had in mind.

Finally, the District Commissioner said, "Well, well. Tomorrow is another day. — Richardson's Mahogany Lines! *Who* would have thought to look there? Nobody! It took eighty years after Richardson cut down all the mahogany before it was worthwhile for anybody to go that side again. And ... how long since the late Mr. Pike cut down the last of the 'new' mahogany? Ten to fifteen years ago. So it would be sixty-five to seventy-five years before anybody would have gone that side

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again. Even to *look*. Whatever we may find there would not have been stumbled upon before then, we may be sure. Well, Well.

"Sergeant Bickerstaff, please take these gentlemen's and ladies' statements. Meanwhile, perhaps we can have some further cups of tea...."

Taking the statement, that action so dearly beloved of police officials wherever the Union Jack flies or has flown, went full smoothly. That is, until the moment (Limekiller later realized it was inevitable, but he had not been waiting for it, then), the moment when Sgt. Bickerstaff looked up, raised his pen, asked, "And what made you go and seek for this Indian jar, sir, which gave the clue to this alleged treasure, Mr. Limekiller? That is, in other words, how did you come to know that it was there?"

Limekiller started to speak. Fell silent beyond possibility of speech. But not Captain Sneed.

"He knew that it was there because Old Pike had dreamed it to him that it was there," said Captain Sneed.

Bickerstaff gave a *deep* nod, raised his pen. Set it down. Lifted it up. Looked at Jack. "This is the case, Mr. Limekiller, sir?"

Jack said, "Yes, it is." He had, so suddenly, realized it to be so.

"Doubt" was not the word for the emotion on the police-sergeant's face. "Perplexity," it was. He looked at his superior, the District Commissioner, but the District Commissioner had nothing to advise. It has been said by scholars that the Byzantine Empire was kept alive by its bureaucracy. Chief Clerk Roberts cleared his throat. In the tones of one dictating a routine turn of phrase, he produced the magic words.

"'*Acting upon information received,*'" he said, "'*I went to the region called Crocodile Cove, accompanied by,*' and so carry on from there, Sergeant Bickerstaff," he said.

In life, if not in literature, there is always anticlimax. By rights—by dramatic right, that is — they should all have gone somewhere and talked it all over. Talked it all out. And so tied up all the loose ends. But in fact there was nowhere for them all to go and do this. The police were finished when the statement was finished. District Officer Pike, who had had a long, hard day, did not suggest further cups of tea. Tía Sani's was closed. The Emerging Nation Bar and Club was closed, and in the other clubs and bars local usage and common custom held that the presence of "ladies" was contra-indicated: so did common sense.

Wherever Captain Sneed lived, Captain Sneed was clearly not

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about to offer open house. "Exhausted," he said. And looked it. "Come along, ladies, I will walk along with you as far as the Guest House. Limekiller. Tomorrow."

What should Limekiller do? Carry them off to his landing at the Grand Arawack? Hospitality at Government Guest House, that relic of days when visitors, gaunt and sore from mule transport, would arrive at an even smaller St. Michael's, hospitality there was reported to be of a limited nature; but surely it was better than a place where the urinals were tied up in brown paper and string? (—Not that *they*'d use them anyway, the thought occurred.)

May said, "Well, if you get sick again, yell like Hell for us."

Felix said, reaching out her slender hand, whose every freckle he had come to know and love, she said, *"Will you be all right, Jack?" Will you be all right, Jack?* Not, mind you, *You'll be all right, Jack.* It was enough. (And if it wasn't, this was not the time and place to say what would be.)

"I'll be all right," he assured her.

But, back on his absurdly sheeted bed, more than slightly fearful of falling asleep at all, the river, the moment he closed his eyes, the river began to unfold before him, mile after beautiful and haunted mile. But this was a fairly familiar effect of fatigue. He had known it to happen with the roads and the wheatfields, in the Prairie Provinces.

It was on awakening to the familiar cockeling chorus of, *I make the sun to rise!* that he realized that he had not dreamed at all.

St. Michael's did not have a single bank; and, what was more — or less — it did not have a single lawyer. Attorneys for the Estate (alerted perhaps by the telephone's phantom relay) arrived early. But they did not arrive early enough ... early enough to delay the digging. By the time the first lawyeriferous automobile came spinning to a stop before the local courthouse, the expedition was already on its way. The attorney for the Estate requested a delay, the attorneys for the several groups of claimants requested a delay. But the Estate's local agent had already given a consent, and the magistrate declined to set it aside. He did not, however, forbid them to attend.

Also in attendance was one old woman and one small girl. Limekiller thought that both of them looked familiar. And he was right. One was the same old woman who had urged him in out of the "fever rain." The other was the child who had urged him to see "the beauty harse" and had next day made the meager purchases in Mikeloglu's shop ... whom the merchant had

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addressed as "Bet-ty me gyel," and urged her (with questionable humor) not to forget him when she was rich.

The crocodile stayed unvexed in his lair beneath the roots of the old Garobo Tree, though, seemingly, half the dragons along the river had dived to alert him.

To walk five hundred feet, *as a start,* is no great feat if one is in reasonable health. To cut and hack and ax and slash one's way through bush whose clearings require to be cleared twice a year if they are not to vanish: this is something else. However, the first five hundred feet proved to be the hardest (and hard enough to eliminate all but the hardiest of the lawyers). At the end of that first line they found their second marker: a lichen-studded rock growing right out of the primal bones of the earth. From there on, the task was easier. Clearly, though "the late Mr. Pike" had not intended it to be impossible, he had intended it to be difficult.

Sneed had discouraged, Marin had discouraged, others had discouraged May and Felix from coming: uselessly. Mere weight of male authority having proven to be obsolescent, Captain Sneed appealed to common sense. "My dear ladies," he pleaded, "can either of you handle a machete? Can either of you use an ax? Can —"

"Can either of us carry food?" was May's counter-question.

"*And* water?" asked Felix. "Both of us can," she said.

"Well, good for both of you," declared Captain Sneed, making an honorable capitulation of the fortress.

May had a question of her own. "Why do we all have to wear *boots?*" she asked, when there are hardly any wet places along here."

"Plenty tommy*goff,* Mees."

"Tommy Goff? Who is *he?*"

"Don't know who *he* was, common enough name, though, among English-speaking people in this part of the Caribbean. Don't know why they named a snake after the chap, either...."

A slight pause. "A ... snake...?"

"And *such* a snake, too! The dreaded fer-de-lance, as they call it in the French islands."

"Uhh ... *Poi*sonous?"

Sneed wiped his sweating head, nodded his Digger-style bush hat. "*Dead*ly poisonous. If it's in full venom, bite can kill a horse. Sometimes *does.* So do be exceedingly cautious. Please."

There was a further word on the subject, from Filiberto Marin. "*En castellano, se llame 'barba amarilla.'*"

This took a moment to sink in. Then one of the North Americans asked, "Doesn't that mean 'yellow beard'?"

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"Quite right. In fact, the tommygoff's other name in English is 'yellow jaw.' But the Spanish is, literally, yes, it's yellow *beard.*"

All three North Americans said, as one, *"Oh."* And looked at each other with a wild surmise.

The noises went on all around them. *Slash —! Hack —!* And, *Chop! Chop! Chop!* After another moment, May went on, "Well, I must say that seems like quite a collection of watchies that your late Mr. Leopold Pike appointed. Crocodiles. Poison serpents. What else. Oh. Do garobo *bite?*"

"Bite your nose or finger off if you vex him from the front; yes."

May said, thoughtfully, "I'm not sure that I really *like* your late Mr. Leopold Pike —"

Another flash of daytime lightning. Limekiller said, and remembered saying it the day before in the same startled tone, videlicet: "Pike! Pike!" Adding, this time, *"Fer-de-lance ...!"*

Felix gave him her swift look. Her face said, No, he was not feverish.... Next she said, *"'Fer,'* that's French for 'iron,' and ... Oh. I see. Yes. Jesus. *Fer-de-lance,* lance-iron, or spear-head. Or spear-*point.* Or —"

"Or in other words," May wound up, *"Pike....* You dreamed that, too, small John?"

He swung his ax again, nodded. *Thunk.* "Sort of ... one way or another." *Thunk.* "He had a, sort of a, pike with him." *Thunk.* "Trying to get his point — ha-ha — across. Did I dream the snake, too? Must have ... I guess...." *Thunk.*

"No. I do *not, like* your late Mr. Leopold Pike."

Sneed declared a break. Took sips of water, slowly, carefully. Wiped his face. Said, "You might have liked Old Pike, though. A hard man in his way. Not without a sense of humor, though. And ... after all ... he hasn't hurt our friend John Limekiller ... has he? Old chap Pike was simply trying to do his best for his dead son's child. May seem an odd way, to us. May *be.* Fact o'the matter: *Is.* Why didn't he do it another way? Who's to say. Didn't have too much trust in the law and the law's delays. I'll sum it up. *Pike liked to do things in his own way.* A lot of them were Indian ways. *Old* Indian ways. Used to burn copal gum when he went deer hunting. *Al*ways got his deer. And as for *this* little business, well ... the old Indians had no probate courts. What's the consequence? How does one guarantee that one's bequest reaches one's intended heir?

"Why ... one *dreams* it to him! Or, for that matter, *her.* In this case, however, the *her* is a small child. So —"

One of the woodsmen put down his tin cup, and, thinking Sneed

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had done, said to Limekiller, "Mon, you doesn't holds de ox de same way we does. But you holds eet well. Where you learns dis?"

"Oh ..." said Limekiller, vaguely, "I've helped cut down a very small part of Canada without benefit of chain saw. In my even younger days." Would he, too, he wondered, in his even older days, would he too ramble on about the trees he had felled? — the deeds he had done?

Probably.

Why not?

A wooden chest would have moldered away. An iron one would have rusted. Perhaps for these reasons the "collection of gold and silver coins, not being Coin of the Realm or Legal Tender," had been lodged in more Indian jars. Larger ones, this time. An examination of one of them showed that the contents were as described. Once again the machetes were put to use; branches, vines, ropes, were cut and trimmed. Litters, or slings, rough but serviceable, were made. Was some collective ethnic unconscious at work here? Had not the Incas, Aztecs, Mayas, ridden in palanquins?

Now for the first time the old woman raised her voice. "Ahl dis fah *you*, Bet-ty," she said, touching the ancient urns. "Bet-tah food. Fah *you*. Bet-tah house. Fah *you*, Bet-tah school. Fah *you*." Her gaze was triumphant. "*Ahl dis fah you!*"

One of the few lawyers who had not dropped out along the long, hard way, had a caveat. "Would the Law of Treasure Trove apply?" he wondered. "In which case, the Crown would own it. Although, to be sure, where there is no attempt at concealment The Crown would allow a finder's fee ... Mr. Limekiller...?"

And if anyone attempt to resist or set aside this my Intention, I do herewith and hereafter declare that he, she or they shall not sleep well of nights...

Limekiller said, "I'll pass."

And Captain Sneed cried, "Piffle! Tush! Was the Deed of Gift registered, or was it not? Was the Stamp Tax paid, or was it not?"

One of the policemen said, "If you have the Queen's head on your paper, you cahn't go wrong."

"*Nol. con.*," the lawyer said. And said no more.

That had been that. The rest were details. (One of the details was found in one of the large jars: another piece of plastic-wrapped paper, on which was written in a now-familiar hand, *He who led you hither, he may now sleep well of nights.*) And in the resolution of these other details the three North Americans had no part. Nor had Marín and friends: back to Parrot Bend they went. Nor had Captain Sneed. "Holiday is over," he said.

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"If I don't get back to my farm, the wee-wee ants will carry away my fruit. Come and visit, all of you. Whenever you like. Anyone will tell you where it is," he said. And was gone, the brave old Digger bush-hat bobbing away down the lane: wearing an invisible plume.

And the major (and the minor) currents of life in St. Michael of the Mountains went on — as they had gone on for a century without them.

There was the inevitable let-down.

May said, with a yawn, "I need a nice, long rest. And I know just where I'm going to find it. *After* we get back to King Town. I'm going to take a room at that hotel near the National Library."

Felix asked, "Why?"

"*Why?* I'll be like a kid in a candy warehouse. Do you realize that on the second floor of the National Library is the largest collection of 19th century English novels which I have ever seen in any one place? EVerything EVer written by EVerbody. Mrs. Edgeworth, Mrs. Trollope, Mrs. Gaskell, Mrs. Oliphant, Mrs. This and Mrs. That."

"Mrs. That. *I* remember *her.* Say, she wasn't bad at all —"

"No, she *was*n't. Although, personally, I prefer Mrs. This."

Felix and Limekiller found that they were looking at each other. *Speak now,* he told himself. *Aren't you tired of holding your own piece?* "And what are you going to be doing, then?" he asked.

She considered. Said she wasn't sure.

There was a silence.

"Did I tell you about my boat?"

"*No.* You didn't." Her look at him was a steady one. She didn't seem impatient. She seemed to have all the time in the world. "Tell me all about your boat," she said.

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ISAAC ASIMOV

Science

RINGS AND THINGS

I imagine that some of you must by now have noticed that there is a science fiction magazine on the stands by the name of *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* (*IASFM*). Those of you who have seen it may conceivably be wondering from month to month whether my backlog of articles will give out and whether I will then cease to appear in the hallowed pages of *F&SF*.

The answer to that is: No chance!

I am a permanent fixture at *F&SF*, until I pass on to the great typewriter in the sky, or until Ed Ferman gives me the boot, whichever comes first. Since this is the twentieth essay published in *F&SF* since *IASFM* first appeared, you can see that I mean it.

Meanwhile, though, more than one person has written to ask if this double role of mine does not represent a conflict of interest.

The answer to that is: Certainly not!

When Joel Davis of Davis Publications suggested the new magazine to me in early 1976 and told me that it had to have my name in the title to match the names in the titles of his other fiction magazines, I told him that I could on no account agree to this if it meant abandoning my *F&SF* column. Joel

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promptly agreed to allow the column to continue.

I then consulted Ed Ferman of *F&SF* and Ben Bova of *Analog* for I had to find out whether either editor would have serious objections to the new venture. Both are close friends of mine of many years standing and you may take it for granted that I would do nothing to hurt either one.

Both Ed and Ben assured me that a new, strong magazine would provide another short-story market and would in that way encourage writers, especially new young writers. This would strengthen the field generally and work to the benefit of the other magazines as well.

So you see, everything I did was open and above board, and I made sure of obtaining the consent and blessings of all concerned before making a move.

Having straightened out that matter, let's forget it and go on about our business. We will take up the outer Solar system where exciting things have been happening —

In the October 1968, issue of *F&SF*, I discussed Saturn's rings in my essay "Little Found Satellite" and said: "There was simply nothing like Saturn's ring in the heavens, *and there still isn't.* It is absolutely unique among all the heavenly features we can see."

That was ten years ago, but even then I might have asked why Saturn's ring system should have been unique. Let's think about it now.

In 1849, the French astronomer, Edouard A. Roche, showed that any sizable satellite with the same density as the planet it circled would be broken up by gravitational influences if it were closer to the planet than 2.44 times the planetary radius. This is called the "Roche limit."* The satellite would be broken up into irregular chunks of comparatively small size and these, as a result of tidal effects and mutual collisions, would eventually take up more or less circular orbits in the equatorial plane of the planet.

Conversely, if a vast array of fragments were circling a planet at a distance less than Roche's limit, they would be unable to coalesce into a sizable satellite.

The equatorial radius of Saturn is 60,400 kilometers (37,500 miles), so the Roche limit for Saturn is 147,400 kilometers (91,500 miles).

Saturn's ring system extends from an inner edge at 72,000 kilometers

**Roche assumed the satellite would be held together by gravitational effects only. Since satellites are usually held together by electromagnetic bonding, too, they might get a little closer than the Roche limit before breaking up.*

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(45,000 miles) from the center of Saturn to an outer edge at 137,000 kilometers (85,000 miles) from the center of Saturn; or from 1.2 to 2.3 times Saturn's radius.

Janus, the closest known sizable satellite of the Saturnian system, is at a distance of 159,500 kilometers (99,000 miles) from Saturn's center, or 2.6 times Saturn's radius.

In other words, the entire Saturnian ring system lies within the Roche limit, while Janus lies just beyond the Roche limit.

Is this a situation that should exist for all planets? When a planet forms, might there not be an extension of material, gradually thinning, for millions of kilometers about itself? Might not the material outside the Roche limit form a series of satellites, and the material within the Roche limit form rings — as apparently was the case with Saturn?

In the case of the inner planets, this proposed scenario might fail, since the Solar wind could be strong enough, at near distances to the Sun, to sweep away the outer, less dense, portions of the cloud that was coalescing to form a planet, leaving nothing out of which satellites might form.

Thus, Mercury and Venus have no satellites. Earth has the Moon, but the latter is of dubious origin and may well have been an independent planet captured by the Earth well after the origin of both. As for Mars, it has two satellites, but both are tiny and are almost certainly captured asteroids (see "Dark and Bright," *F&SF*, December, 1977).

That leaves us, though, with the planets of the outer Solar system. They are so far from the Sun that the Solar wind, enfeebled by distance, would have done little to sweep away matter in the outskirts of the forming planet.

Then, too, the outer planets, at their distance from the Sun, would be frigid enough to collect the hydrogen, helium, and hydrogen compounds, that the inner planets, in the Sun's neighborhood, would be too warm to retain. The outer planets would therefore grow to giant size and would develop gravitational fields that could more effectively hold on to the uncoalesced matter in their neighborhood.

The outer planets do, therefore, have satellites. And why not rings as well?

We might argue that it makes sense to suppose that the circum-planetary cloud would extend all the way down to the planet itself and be denser and denser as one approaches the planet. There would then certainly be

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more matter per cubic kilometer within the Roche limit (or what would eventually become the Roche limit as the planet completes its coalescence) than outside it. Such an argument would favor rings for every outer planet.

Suppose we try a counter-argument. There would naturally be a tendency for the matter in the circum-planetary cloud to settle down onto the planet itself. The closer to the planet, the more likely that would be, so it might be that a planet, in forming, sweeps out those regions within the Roche limit. In that case, satellites form, but no rings.

Consider Jupiter. It has thirteen known satellites, possibly fourteen. Of these, all but the innermost five are captured asteroids. Of the five that were probably formed out of the same cloud that formed Jupiter, four are satellite giants, of the order of size of our own Moon. All of these are well outside the Roche limit. For Jupiter, the Roche limit is 174,460 kilometers (108,400 miles), and the innermost of the giant satellites, Io, is at a distance 2.4 times that of the Roche limit.

The fifth satellite, Amalthea, is, however, closer to Jupiter than Io is and circles the planet at a distance of 180,500 kilometers (112,000 miles). This is only 1.035 times the Roche limit. If Amalthea were only 6,000 kilometers (3,600 miles) closer to Jupiter, tidal effects would break it up and it would form a set of rings about Jupiter. So close is Jupiter to being a ringed planet.

However, Amalthea is no giant satellite. It is perhaps 150 kilometers (90 miles) in diameter, only 1/10,000 of the mass of Europa, the smallest of Jupiter's giant satellites. Apparently, so much of the matter in the Amalthean vicinity was picked up by Jupiter in the days of formation that what was left over sufficed only for a moon-let.*

But then, since Jupiter has no rings, why should Saturn have them? And if Saturn has rings, why should Jupiter have none?

We might argue that Saturn just happens to be in the "just right" position.

When the Solar system formed, the density of the material in the original cloud must have decreased steadily with distance from the Sun. That's why Jupiter is the largest of the four outer giants, 3 1/3 times as massive as Saturn. Saturn is, in its turn, about 6 times as massive as either Uranus or Neptune.

**Amalthea's mass is only about 1/5600 that of Saturn's rings. Amalthea wouldn't make much of a ring system even if it did break up.*

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It might be argued, therefore, that Jupiter is so massive and its gravitational field so intense that it swept out the matter within its Roche limit very effectively. Uranus and Neptune, on the other hand, had so little matter about themselves that there wasn't enough to form noticeable rings after their comparatively feeble gravities were through sweeping up what they could.

Saturn, however, was just close enough to the Sun to be surrounded by considerable matter and just far enough to be too small to sweep up its near-vicinity effectively. It therefore left sufficient matter behind within the Roche limit to form its splendid rings.

But wait! I said Uranus and Neptune might not form "noticeable" rings. After all, it isn't a matter of gorgeous rings, like Saturn's, or none at all. Might there not be small, unpretentious ones. Jupiter is close enough to allow astronomers to be sure there is nothing to speak of closer than Amalthea. Uranus and Neptune, however, are far distant and hard to observe. How certain can we be, then, that there are no rings at all out there? Narrow ones? Dim ones?

I don't know that the question ever arose, but in 1973, a British astronomer, Gordon Taylor, calculated that Uranus would move in front of a 9th magnitude star, SAO 158687, in the constellation Libra, on March 10, 1977.

On that day, James L. Elliot and associates from Cornell University observed the occultation from an airplane that took them high enough to minimize the distorting and obscuring effects of the lower atmosphere.

The notion was to observe just how the starlight was affected as Uranus reached the star and began to encroach upon it. The starlight would penetrate Uranus's upper atmosphere and would, in this way, yield information about its atmospheric temperature, pressure, and composition.

But some time before Uranus reached the star, the starlight suddenly dimmed for about seven seconds and brightened. Then, as Uranus approached still more closely, there were four more brief episodes of dimming, for a second each. Uranus eventually passed in front of the star and as the planet moved away on the other side, there was the same dimming of starlight in reverse; four times for a second each and then a fifth time for seven seconds. (Other astronomers studying the occultation also observed the dimming effect.)

Something was obscuring the star, something in Uranus's vicinity. At

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first, Elliot thought it was a satellite, or several of them, but after he had a chance to study the data and notice the symmetrical nature of the dimming, he knew it had to be rings. Uranus had to have a ring system consisting of five rings, one inside the other.

Why did it take so long to discover the rings of Uranus?

First, Uranus is distant. The total distance light must travel from the Sun to a planet to Earth is four times as great for Uranus as for Saturn so that, all things being equal, the Uranian ring-system would be only 1/16 as bright as the Saturnian system.

Second, all things are not equal. The Uranian rings are very narrow. The thin ones that obscured the star for only a second apiece are each about 12 kilometers (7.5 miles) wide, and the wide one might be 85 kilometers (50 miles) wide. The total width of the Uranian rings is 170 kilometers (105 miles) as compared with a total width, allowing for gaps, of 64,000 kilometers (40,000 miles) for the Saturnian rings.

Third, the material in the Uranian rings is more thinly strewn than that within the Saturnian rings. The star, in passing behind the Uranian rings was not blanked out altogether, but was merely dimmed.

Fourth, the Uranian rings are not of the same composition as the Saturnian rings. The Saturnian ring particles are highly reflective, reflecting more than half the light that falls on them, so that the Saturnian rings are almost surely composed of icy particles. The Uranian ring particles are dark, however, and reflect less than a twentieth of the light that falls upon them. They must be made of rocky material, and dark rock at that.

Lumping all these differences — distance, width, density, and reflectivity — we might estimate that the total light reaching us from the Uranian rings may be only 1/3,000,000 that which reaches us from the Saturnian rings.

No wonder, then, that it took us so long to spot the Uranian rings. But for the lucky accident of the occultation, we might still have no idea of their existence.

And what about Neptune now? If Neptune has rings, they might be an even shabbier set than Uranus's. And, as a matter of fact, Neptune occulted a star in 1968. The occultation was observed and the dimming of starlight in Neptune's neighborhood was *not* noted.

Still, our Solar system now has two ringed planets, and it is likely that the general phenomenon of ringed planets in the Universe is much more common a thing than had been thought possible only two years ago.

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The Uranian rings make up only one of the two exciting discoveries of 1977 in the Saturn-Uranus section of the Solar system, however, so let's carry on.

In my essay "Updating the Asteroids" (*F&SF*, August 1974), I concentrated on those asteroids whose orbits carried them out of the asteroid belt and inside the orbit of Mars.

What about asteroids which are unusual in the other respect and which move out of the asteroid belt beyond the orbit of Jupiter? Let's call those "hyperasteroids," a term I have just invented.

The first borderline case of a hyperasteroid was discovered on February 22, 1906 by the German astronomer, Max Wolf. It was asteroid #588, and Wolf named it Achilles. It was the first of the Trojan asteroids to be discovered. This is a group of asteroids that travel in Jupiter's orbit and move in step with the giant planet. Some are in a stable position (L4) which is 60 degrees ahead of the planet, and some are in a stable position (L5) which is 60 degrees behind the planet (see "The Trojan Hearse," *F&SF*, December 1961).

About fifteen Trojans have been spotted in the L4 position and five more in the L5 position, but it has been estimated that there are seven hundred or more Trojans altogether. Naturally, we see only the largest — those that are 100 kilometers (60 miles) or more in diameter.

The Trojan asteroids do not remain exactly in L4 or L5. Their original motion and the gravitational influence of Saturn cause them to oscillate about L4 or L5 in a complicated way as they move about the Sun. Such oscillations can be quite large, and an unlucky concatenation of perturbations may move a Trojan so far from L4 or L5 that it cannot regain its post and it then ceases to be a Trojan. On the other hand, non-Trojan asteroids, moving nearby, may, under favorable conditions of perturbation be captured and become Trojan. On the whole, then, the Trojan positions probably lose a few, win a few, and remain about as they are.

A Trojan asteroid, if ejected from its position, is quite likely to have part of its new orbit well beyond that of Jupiter. It may then spend most of its time beyond Jupiter since any body moves more slowly as its distance from the Sun increases.

In 1920, the German astronomer, Walter Baade, discovered asteroid #944, which he called Hidalgo, and which may well be an ejected Trojan.

Hidalgo has a high orbital eccentricity of 0.66. At perihelion, the point in its orbit that is closest to the Sun, it is only about 300,000,000 kilo-

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meters from the Sun, and it is then neatly within the asteroid belt. At aphelion, however, when it is farthest from the Sun, it is 1,450,000,000 kilometers (895,000,000 miles) away, or just at the distance of Saturn from the Sun.*

Hidalgo is a clear case of a hyperasteroid, and its orbital period is 13.7 years, the only known inhabitant of the asteroid belt to have a year that is longer than that of Jupiter.

There is another group of asteroids that accompany Jupiter even more closely than the Trojans do, that are neither before nor behind it, but are right there with it in the form of captured satellites.

Eight of these are now known. They were discovered more or less in order of decreasing size and, therefore, brightness.

The first to be discovered is usually known as J-VI, because it was the sixth to be seen. It was discovered in 1904 by the American astronomer, Charles Dillon Perrine.

Of Jupiter's captured satellites, J-VI is the closest to Jupiter. Its mean distance from Jupiter is 11,470,000 kilometers (7,100,000 miles) and it has an orbital period of 0.69. Its diameter is about 120 kilometers (75 miles).

The latest to be discovered is J-XIII. It was detected in 1974 by the American astronomer, Charles Kowal, and is only about 8 kilometers (5 miles) in diameter.

The known satellite farthest from Jupiter is J-IX, which was discovered by the American astronomer, Seth Barnes Nicholson in 1914. It has a diameter of about 15 kilometers (9 miles). Its mean distance from Jupiter is 23,700,000 kilometers (14,600,000 miles) and its orbital period is 2.07 years. No other satellite in the Solar system is so far from its primary, or has so long an orbital period.

Undoubtedly, there are other captured asteroids in the farther reaches of Jupiter's far-stretching influence, but even if there are, they are not true hyperasteroids. Their average orbit is precisely that of Jupiter, as is also true of the Trojans.

Even Hidalgo, which spends most of its time beyond Jupiter, returns each revolution to the haven of the asteroid belt.

The question is: Are there any asteroids that are purely hyperasteroidal, with orbits laying *entirely* beyond that of Jupiter?

It seems to me there must be. In fact, we know of two cases.

**Hidalgo's orbital inclination is 43 degrees, however, so that if we count in the third dimension, it never approaches any closer to Saturn than Earth does.*

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In 1898, only eight satellites were known to be circling Saturn. In that year, the American astronomer, William Henry Pickering, discovered a ninth on a photographic plate. It was the first satellite to be discovered by photography. Pickering named it Phoebe after a Titaness in the Greek myths.

The mean distance of Phoebe from Saturn turned out to be 12,900,000 kilometers (8,030,000 miles) or 3.6 times the distance of the next most distant satellite, Iapetus. Phoebe's orbit was more eccentric and considerably more inclined to Saturn's equatorial plane, than was true for any other Saturnian satellite. The general astronomical opinion then is that Phoebe is a captured asteroid.

As in the case of the captured Jovian satellites, Phoebe is small, with a diameter of only about 300 kilometers (180 miles). It is quite possible that there are other, smaller objects in the outer reaches of the Saturnian system which we don't see only because they aren't as large as Phoebe.

Where did Phoebe come from though? Was it an ejected Trojan that blundered its way into Saturn's grasp? If you're content with that explanation, then let's pass on to another object.

Neptune has a large satellite, Triton, with a diameter of about 4,000 kilometers (2,500 miles). It was discovered within days of the discovery of Neptune itself. A century later, in 1949, the Dutch-American astronomer, Gerard Peter Kuiper, located a second Neptunian satellite, which he named Nereid.

Nereid, which is about as large as Phoebe, has a very unusual orbit. Its mean distance from Neptune is 5,560,000 kilometers (3,450,000 miles) or fifteen times as great as that of Triton, but that is not all. Nereid's orbit is an elongated ellipse and has an eccentricity of 0.75, far greater than that of any other satellite in the Solar system.

When it is at its closest point to Neptune, Nereid is only 1,400,000 kilometers (900,000 miles) away, but at the other end of its orbit it recedes to a distance of 9,500,000 kilometers (6,000,000 miles).

Nereid bears all the earmarks of a captured asteroid, but, in that case, where was it captured from? It is simply stretching things beyond the point of belief to suppose that Nereid was ejected from the asteroid belt with enough force to send it out to Neptune's orbit.

It seems to make much more sense to suppose that hyperasteroids exist in sizable numbers throughout the outer Solar system and that it is only their great distance from us that makes it so hard to spot them. Each of the giant planets may have far more captured asteroids as part of their

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satellite system than we can see from Earth, and each of them — and not Jupiter only — may have asteroids in their L4 and L5 positions.

Nor is it just that hyperasteroids are very hard to see. Astronomers haven't really been looking for them. In searching for asteroids, they look for objects moving at the characteristic speed of the asteroid belt, a speed faster than that of Jupiter. Hyperasteroids would be moving at much slower speeds and might well be overlooked for that reason.

On November 1, 1977, for instance, Charles Kowal, the discoverer of J-XIII, was studying his photographic plates. He was searching for distant comets which, of course, move across the sky more slowly than any other asteroids except for Hidalgo in the farther part of its orbit.

He detected something that looked about the right brightness and was moving slowly — but it was moving *too* slowly. It was moving at only one-third the speed expected of a Trojan asteroid and therefore it would have to be something much farther away.

It was moving so slowly, in fact, that it would have to be somewhere in the vicinity of the orbit of Uranus, and allowing for that distance it would have to be something of asteroidal size, along the order of the size of Phoebe or Nereid.

It was not part of the Uranian satellite system, however. In fact, it was nowhere near Uranus, which, at the time, was almost exactly on the other side of the Sun.

Kowal followed it for a period of days, worked out an approximate orbit, then started looking for it on earlier photographic plates covering the regions where it ought to have been. He located it here and there and, eventually, enough positions were plotted for an accurate orbit to be worked out. Kowal named the new object Chiron, after the best known centaur in the Greek myths.

Chiron turned out to have quite an elliptical orbit, with an eccentricity of 0.38. At aphelion it is 2,800,000,000 kilometers (1,740,000,000 miles) from the Sun, which is about as far as Uranus gets. Chrion was at aphelion in November 1970 and has been moving closer to the Sun ever since.

At perihelion, where Chiron was in August 1945 and where it will be again in February 1996, Chiron is 1,270,000,000 kilometers (790,000,000 miles) from the Sun and it will then be slightly closer to the Sun than Saturn is.

In short, Chiron seems to gallop in true centaur-fashion between the orbits of Saturn and Uranus. Its orbital inclination is 6.9 degrees, though, so that there is no danger of its colliding with either planet. It never gets

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closer than 150,000,000 kilometers (95,000,000 miles) to Saturn and misses Uranus by considerably more than that. Its period of revolution is 50.7 years

Chiron is the first pure and independent hyperasteriod to be discovered, but I feel it is only the first of a large group, and once we establish astronomical observatories in space (say, on Phobos or Deimos) and thoroughly computerize our search, we will find them by the thousands.

LEIGH BRACKETT HAMILTON *7 December 1915 - 18 March 1978*

The first and last times I ever saw Leigh Brackett, we were at conventions. At the World Con in 1952 Ed Hamilton, whom I had met, introduced us by snagging me as a dance partner for Leigh.

In those days, what is merely a masquerade contest at modern conventions was a frivolous and hugely enjoyable costume ball. I often suspected that this feature was one of the things that drew Leigh to conventions — it was one dance which Ed would gladly attend.

I once offered that theory to Leigh. She winked at me and remained discreetly silent.

There were more important reasons why she attended so many conventions. She loved science fiction — reading it, writing it, talking about it. There is a special rapport among science fiction people that makes a convention a second home for them. Marion Zimmer Bradley has described the time between conventions as "normal," and conventions themselves as existing in "real time." Leigh felt exactly the same way — science fiction was the most important element in her life.

Of course she knew that she was admired and respected as a writer, and she could accept a compliment with gentle grace. But she was always ready to tell another author how much she liked his or her work. And everyone knew that her favorite author was Ed Hamilton.

I last saw Leigh at the World Fantasy Convention in LA, October 1977. But only the weekend before that, we had met at the Octocon in Santa Rose, California, after a regrettable lapse of over five years.

At the Octocon, Leigh presented the first annual Edmund Hamilton award — and the criterion for the award was a "sense of wonder." That phrase describes Leigh's work as well as Ed's. More than that, it describes Leigh's entire attitude toward science fiction. I think that she always thought of herself as a fan.

When she first saw me that weekend, she said: "I don't suppose you remember me, do you?"

As if I could ever forget Leigh Brackett Hamilton. Not the writer who gave so much to the field she loved. And certainly not the lovely, laughing woman whose loss I regret so terribly.

As if any of us could forget Leigh Brackett.

—Randall Garrett

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Robert Young's new story is a brisk and entertaining tale about D. D. Rinehart, alias Nancy Drew, a futuristic private eye who takes on an offbeat case involving doppelgangers and call girls.

Hologirl

by ROBERT F. YOUNG

We are looking for girls with Zing, Zest and Zowie to help promote our clients' products on 3V—

Talent Associates
Sespol Bldg., Suite 1400
Idealia

I handed the clipping back to my caller. Before tossing it onto my transparent desktop, he'd informed me that he had good reason to believe that Amos Kurilman, who, in conjunction with his wife, ran the agency, was a pimp.

"You think it's a front for a call-girl operation?"

Sespol nodded his peruked head without removing his gaze from where it had been ever since he'd sat down opposite me — on my legs. "An egregious front, Ms. Rinehardt. The girls even have the gall to live right on the premises. And there must be hundreds of them! The lobby's equipped with an electronic surveillance system that comes on after dark, and the same faces never show up on the tapes more than twice. The Sespol Sky-Rise is a respectable office building, restricted to respectable businesses. During the day, girls go up to Suite 1400 where, presumably, they are interviewed; they then come back down again and depart. Fine and dandy. But if my other renters ever get wind of the *other* girls who come and go after hours, they may not renew their leases. Worse, they may even cancel them."

"So you want proof of what the *other* girls are doing so you can cancel Kurilman's lease."

"'Flagrante delicto proof,' if I may be so bold as to coin a term. Something tangible I can show him that will cause him to slink off into the night, dragging his tails behind him, so to speak (ha-ha!), without the incident making the media. In a word, a hard-core porno-photo."

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"My fee is $300 a day, plus expenses," I said in the brusque Philip Marlow tone of voice I reserve for such occasions. "$700 in advance."

"That's pretty steep for snapping a dirty picture."

"It's not that simple. Before I snap it I have to find out what the score is, and that means legwork. Incidentally, that V-shaped cicatrix on my left kneecap you seem so fascinated by is a mememto of an overnight hike I went on when I was a brownie and fell on a beer can."

He raised his pale-blue eyes to my face. He gave a little giggle. Then, abruptly all business, he stood up, counted out fourteen fifties from his shoulder purse and arranged them on my desktop. "I hope you're as good as they say you are."

"I'm better."

D. D. Rinehardt, Private Investigator, it says on my office door. *If I can't find out what you want to know, nobody can.*

The Sespol Sky-Rise rises like a glass phallus from between two inflated electricar-domes that suggest a pair of gonads. I found a parking spot for my Blue Jay in one of the latter, entered the building proper and took the main elevator to the fourteenth floor. Psychedelic walls, knee-deep pile carpeting, gilt doors with bas-relief lettering, a genuine antique fireman's ax hanging in a recessed glass display case.... The door I sought proved to be a double one. *Talent,* the lettering on the left one said; *Associates,* on the other. They opened to my touch, and I stepped into a commodious reception room.

More knee-deep pile carpeting. Comfy-chairs arranged artfully along luminous walls. A long, low center-table imbricated with popular periodicals. A mahoganoid desk with a big brown female sitting behind it. A nameplate reading *Cecily Sturmi Kurilman.* An inner door just to the desk's left.

The hour was early (9:30, or thereabouts), but already most of the chairs were occupied by applicants filling out application forms, or just sitting. I got a form from a pile on the desk and headed for one of the empty chairs, Cecily Sturmi Kurilman's gaze cold upon my back.

While filling in the blanks, I filled myself in on the other applicants with periodic *coups d'oeils. Soi-disant* Zing, Zest and Zowiers came in diverse packages. One of the applicants had legs like a rhino; another, a face like a pizza. A third was pot-bellied and brought to mind a retired hooker. There were three or four dishes, however, that my client Sespol would have gone down on at first sight. Law of averages.

Some of the questions on the

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application form mystified me: *How do you spend your evenings? Do you go out often? If so, where? Are you in any way associated with the following? — The Amour Arms, The Halcyon Hotel, The Tryst Inn.* I answered them with *Watching 3V, No, Nowhere* and *No* respectively. Farther up the page I'd already entered my professional alias — Nancy Drew — and supplied the address of my apartment, which I rent under that name. There was no request for a phone number — odd indeed in these days of monthly mail-delivery. When I finished I gave the completed form to Ms. Kurilman, who rolled it up, placed it in a cylinder and dropped the cylinder into the mouth of a pneumo-tube. "Please be reseated, Ms. Drew. Mr. Kurilman will see you as soon as it's your turn."

I killed time trying mentally to divvy up Sespol's $700 advance among my creditors in such a way as to leave enough to buy a new set of tires for my Blue Jay. Meanwhile, the applicants who were ahead of me were successively processed by Mr. Kurilman. I noticed after a while that the one who entered the inner door was never the next to leave by it, but the one after, and from this I deduced that a sort of intermediate waiting-room existed between the room in which I sat and the room where Kurilman was conducting the interviews (Sespol had told me that the suite comprised six rooms altogether). It turned out to be a cozy little vestibule containing a single comfy-chair and a winged mirror similar to those found in boutiques. When, instinctively, I stepped between the wings, a subdued but penetrating light with no apparent source obligingly came on and bathed me from all angles. In its flattering radiance I pirouetted, gave my bangs a pat and ascertained that my nipples, which I'd painted orange for the occasion, protruded from their paper holes at precise 90-degree angles.

At length the inner inner-door opened, and the applicant who'd preceded me came out. A pink periwigged little man somewhere in his 40s beckoned me to enter. ("Nancy Drew, is it? I'm delighted to meet you, Nancy." "Thank you sir. I'm delighted to meet you, too." Etc.) After looking me over and swallowing (the ones from 16 to 60 swallow; those over 60 salivate), he opened a tattered transcript of *The Duchess of Malfi* seemingly at random, handed it to me and told me to read the duchess' lines.

(*Duch.*) "*I would have you lean your fortune by the hand unto you marriage-bed....*"

Between lines, I saw him stealthily snake my handkerchief out of my handbag and stuff it into his coat pocket.

When I finished, he said, "Yo

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read that very well, Ms. Rinehardt." He took back the transcript. "I like your carriage too." A second swallow, a final once-over. "We'll be in touch."

How? I wondered. By carrier pigeon?

Officially there's no such thing as a master data bank containing up-to-date histories of all private citizens over age 21 and connected like a monstrous macrocosmic spiderweb to every precinct comp in the country. But any private eye worth his or her salt knows better and has at his/her fingertips a precinct employee who can, and will for the right dollar, come up with all he/she needs to know about anyone he/she wants to know it about.

My contact is a male Caucasian, code-name "Gloria," employed at Precinct 2. He got me the following data on Amos Kurilman (material irrelevant to the Kurilman case omitted):

B. Wichita, Kan., Jun. 2, 1978.
Educ. Majored Bus. Rel., Gray's University.
Marital hist. Married Cecily Sturmi, Feb. 6, 2008; no offspring.
Mar. 30, 2009. Went into partnership with Wentworth, Thom; Cert. Bus. "Holography Equip. Mfg. Co." Partnership dissolved Feb. 10, 2017; ftry, equip. sold auct. Feb. 14, 2017.
Sep. 16, 2017. Established talent agency, Cert. Bus. "Talent Associates."
May 20, 2018. Transferred "Talent Associates" from Wichita, Kan. to Cincinnati, O.
Jan. 6, 2019. Transferred "Talent Associates" from Cincinnati, O. to Idealia.
Police record: No police record.
Parapsychodiagnosis: Fetishism; cyclothymia.

I had Gloria do two more data taps (again, material irrelevant to the Kurilman Case omitted):

Sturmi, Cecily
B. Wichita, Kan., Jul. 11, 1980.
Educ. Grad. 12th Grade, Jun. 19, 1998. Took crash-course Speedteaching Mar.-Aug., 2017.
Marital hist. Married Amos Kurilman, Feb. 6, 2008; no offspring.
Mar. 30, 2009 — Feb. 10, 2017. Sec.-treasr. "Holography Equip. Mfg. Co."
Sep. 16, 2017 — Jun. 2, 2019. Sec.-treasr. "Talent Associates."
Police record: Arrested morals charge, Wichita, Kan., Dec. 4, 2001; fined & released. Arrested soliciting, Wichita, Kan., Aug. 17, 2005; fined

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& released. Arrested oper. bawdy house, Wichita, Kan., Nov. 20, 2007; fined & released.

Parapsychodiagnosis: Probable psychopathic personality.

Wentworth, Thom.

B. Wichita, Kan., Jul 11, 1977.

Educ. Majored Mech. Eng., Halger's Institute Tech.

Sideline: Art collecting.

Marital hist. No known marriages.

Mar. 30, 2009. Went into partnership with Kurilman, Amos; Cert. Bus. "Holography Equip. Mfg. Co." Partnership dissolved Feb. 10, 2017.

Jun. 19, 2018. Moved from Wichita, Kan. to Cincinnati, O.

Feb. 21, 2019. Moved from Cincinnati, O. to Idealia. Last known address 616 Sycamore St. Present whereabouts unknown.

Police record: No police record.

Parapsychodiagnosis: Schizoid type; probable progressive alcoholism.

In the precinct parking lot I climbed into my Blue Jay and closed the door. As I did so, someone climbed in the other side and closed the other door. Golden peruke with shoulder-length curls; Mediterranean-blue eyes; faintly hooked nose; wide cheekbones; cheeks only just beginning to sag. Pastel shirt, codpiece skin-slax, copper-studded shoes. A disarming smile. "Permit me to introduce myself, Ms. Rinehardt. I am Gino Odrussi."

In my rearview mirror I glimpsed three bearish musclemen leaning on the hood of a Hawk. "You don't need to introduce yourself," I told Gino. "I've seen your picture in the society pages of the *Idealia Update* at least a thousand times. I just love the way you sit your polo pony — the one your girls bought you for your birthday."

The disarming smile didn't deteriorate in the least. "You know, I'm glad you brought my girls up, Ms. Rinehardt. Because they are why I am here. I protect them like a father, and when I am doing so I do not like to have other parties getting into the act."

I began to see a faint light. "Go on."

"It has come to my attention via certain arcane channels that you have been retained to take steps that will be detrimental to the continued financial well-being of a certain Amos Kurilman. This would be all to the good, Ms. Rinehardt, were not Amos Kurilman my animal cookie, and mine alone."

"What makes him so exclusively yours?"

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"*His* girls are operating in *my* girls' territory. That's bad. Very very bad. But what is worse is their wholesale pricetags. My girls charge $600 per night, of which I take only a modest 33 and 1/3 percent. But *his* girls charge only $400 per night, which means either that he is operating at a loss or taking 50 percent of their earnings. I do not think they would stand for this, which leaves only one conclusion to be drawn: he is operating at a loss with the intent to drive me out of business."

"It's a well-known fact," I said, "that all the call girls of Idealia swear fealty to you. That being so, where does he get his from?"

An eloquent elevation of the hands. A sad shake of the periwigged head. I knew instantly that he was lying when he said, "I have no idea." A grim grin supplanted the disarming smile. "But wherever he is getting them," he went on, "I am going to crumble him. Personally. Which is why I do not want a pretty private eye like you getting in my way, because then I will have to crumble her too." He swallowed surreptitiously, the grim grin dissolved and the disarming smile came back. A hand crept over like a puppy dog and nuzzled my right thigh. "Please do not force poor Gino to disfigure so flawless a work of art. Is it not bad enough that one Venus lost both arms?"

I shooed the puppy dog away. "Get out of my car, you fucking Calabrian bastard!" I said.

The smile sort of froze in place as its owner did my bidding. In my rearview mirror I saw him rejoin the Three Bears. The smile was still there when I pulled out of my parking slot, so wide it filled the whole mirror. Late-morning sunlight pouring down upon the Goldilocks peruke caused a halo to form above it. The illusion was as ephemeral as it was ridiculous. I put it out of my mind, joined the traffic flow and headed for the Orchard.

They have sanctuaries for birds, don't they? And for koalas, seals and hippopotamuses. Why not, then, a sanctuary for wineheads?

Thus, apparently, went the ratiocination of the designers of Idealia when they decided to reserve a tract of land in the center of their model city for those of its dwellers who might someday find themselves at odds with reality and in need of a place to withdraw. The tract happened to be an apple orchard, which was how it got its pop name and which was why, when I stepped through the force-field gate after parking my Blue Jay, I smelled apples.

Rotten ones.

A footpath wound willy-nilly among the trees; I set forth along it. The trees had so many suckers you

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could hardly see the limbs they grew out of. The rotten apples still clinging to the branches and those littering the ground were the size of acorns.

I passed occasional cottages constructed of thrown-away tar paper and scrap lumber, with wine bottles planted in their front yards. The first native I came upon lay sound asleep across the path. I stepped over him and went on. The next one I came upon was sitting under one of the trees. This one was alive. "Good afternoon," I said politely. "I'm looking for a resident named Thomas Wentworth. Can you direct me to his place of abode?"

The native blinked. He was sober, but his vacant eyes left little doubt that the last of his brains had boiled away quite some time ago. "Grwk," he said.

I went on. Another native. Walking. Wearing a slouch hat, a trenchcoat and a pair of toe rubbers. The trenchcoat had moss growing on it. "Kind sir," said I, "are you by any chance acquainted with a fortyish gentlemen of mechanical bent named Thomas Wentworth?"

He was staring at my lead-veined handbag as though he could smell the two pints of Muscatel I'd picked up after leaving the Precinct 2 parking lot. "Thomas Ooh?"

"Never mind," I said and proceeded deeper into the Orchard.

I had better luck with the fourth native I met. "His house is in the holler," he told me.

I had no idea where the "holler" was, but I figured if I kept following the path I'd eventually come to it, and eventually I did. A creek purled over pebbles and broken glass, habitations of various shapes and sizes squatting at sporadic intervals along its bottle-littered banks. Following the creek, I came upon a native washing his socks, but he wasn't the one I was looking for. He was a newcomer (who but a newcomer would bother to wash his socks?) and, relatively speaking, young for a winehead. Young enough and not yet far gone enough to swallow when he saw me. When he made a grab for me as I passed I whacked his hand with my handbag. When he lunged for me I gave him another whack, this time on the side of the head. I left him sitting in the middle of the creek, sobbing.

I don't much care for wineheads.

Wentworth didn't have a mailbox out front with his name on it, but I was sure when I came to the one-room prefab with the window boxes that it was his. There was nothing in the window boxes except wine bottles, but they still provided a distinction of sorts, and Went-

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worth, I was certain, was not a typical winehead.

I ascended a trio of warped steps to a wobbly stoop and looked through a screenless screendoor. "Thomas Wentworth?"

The figure slumped in the room's only chair stirred. "Thomas Wentworth is dead. *Requiescat in pace.*"

I stepped inside, opened my handbag and tossed one of the two pints of Muscatel (miraculously, neither was broken) into his lap. I set the other on a nearby window sill. Wentworth opened the one I'd tossed him and chug-a-lugged a third of its contents. After he wiped his mouth on his shirtsleeve, I said, "In five minutes, I'm leaving. Whether or not I take the other pint with me depends on how promptly and straightforwardly you provide answers to a few questions I'm going to ask. Ready? Here comes the first: Did you and Kurilman part friends?"

I couldn't see his face very well in the dim, foliage-filtered light coming in the windows and the door. Wineheads don't have faces anyway — only molding clay that keeps sagging no matter how many times they press it back into shape. At length Wentworth said, "Kurilman paid me what I asked. He knew what I'd do with the money. And he knew that after a year or so I'd be too far gone to build another machine and that in the interim I wouldn't try. No, I guess you could hardly say we parted friends. But we didn't part enemies either."

"You blackmail him, of course."

"Regularly. But only for a little at a time."

"This machine you alluded to — what did you call it?"

"A holoplicator."

"And what does it do?"

Wentworth chug-a-lugged the rest of the pint and tossed the bottle into a corner. "It doesn't matter what it does, because it only does it temporarily, and with respect to what I invented it for, it doesn't do it at all. I failed."

"Kurilman didn't seem to think so. He bought you out. Why?"

"I don't know why."

"You know perfectly well why."

"All right. I know why now. But I didn't then."

"Is that the why of the wine?"

"Young lady, there is no why of the wine. Only the wine."

"I know," I said. "But you're only the second winehead I've ever known who admitted it."

"Who wash the first?"

"My father," I said and went out and closed the door.

"D. D. Rinehardt, as I live and breathe," said the taller of the two executive types when I came out of the breakfastmat next morning.

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"Or is it Nancy Drew?" said the shorter, taking my arm and guiding me to the Sparrow parked behind my Blue Jay.

I can smell IRS agents a mile away. Maybe it's the periwig powder they use. "Are we going for a ride?"

"In the park."

Pinched between them on the narrow front seat, I watched the streets and avenues unwind beneath the greenery of maples, sycamores, lindens and box elders. Ideal city smothered with green boughs. The park closed around us: songbirds sang; robins hopped on dappled swards; lovers held hands on benches growing out of trees. *Morning is when I am awake and there is a dawn in me.*

When he was winiest, my father used to look out into the back yard and say that, even when it was night.

The taller of my two escorts parked the Sparrow opposite an oak-tree bench, and the three of us got out and sat down, me in the middle. "Ms. Rinehardt," said the shorter, "we've got your number."

"You've been watching too many antique movies on 3V," I told him.

"Button your lip, sister," said the taller.

Another antique-movie buff. "What's the rap?" I asked.

"No rap, sweetstuff. Just a warning. The IRS is already onto Kurilman and we don't want outsiders poking around. One of Idealia's concerned citizens — a very prominent one — put us wise to the white-slavery racket Talent Associates's a front for, and we're almost ready to close in on our man."

"Unreported income, huh?"

"You bet, unreported income! Oh, are we going to get him! Aren't we, Bernie?"

"You bet, Sam!"

I didn't have to go on sitting there. I knew it and they knew it. I stood up. "Sure you're going to get him," I said. "You're going to get him the way your IRS forefathers got Al Capone. You're going to get him for not leaving a tip for the waitress and let him get away without paying for his pasta. And afterward you're going to go around bragging about it."

With that, I walked over to the curb and flagged down a passing electricab. "We'll audit you!" Sam screamed as I climbed in.

I slammed the door. "Go ahead and audit!" I hollered out the window.

HOUSEWIFE SEES DOPPELGANGER; *Claims she saw self exiting from local hotel.* Mrs. Ralph Comminger this morning told the Roving *Update* Reporter that while she was driving by

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the Halcyon Hotel — "an establishment of low repute I wouldn't dream of patronizing" — she saw herself coming out of it. Etc.

CALL GIRL ARRESTED FOR OPERATING WITHOUT A LICENSE VANISHES FROM JAIL CELL; *Leaves dress, undies and shoes behind; believed to be walking the streets naked.* Police, acting on a phone call from a concerned citizen, early this morning arrested an unlicensed call girl, who carried no identification, as she was leaving the room of a client at the Tryst Inn. Upon confiscating an envelope concealed on her person, they discovered it contained three $100- and two $50-bills. Etc.

ALLEGED CALL GIRL TURNS OVER NEW LEAF: REFUSES FURTHER RELATIONS WITH CASH CUSTOMER; *Claims to be respectable housewife.* James P. Rowe, arrested last night for assaulting Marianna Mori, insists she is the call girl to whom he paid $400 three nights ago for services rendered at the Amour Arms. Etc.

I didn't bother scanning the rest of the *Idealia Update* back-issues the morgue selectacron had deposited in the carrel. Except for a missing paragraph, I already had the whole story. The time had come for me to earn my $700.

Since I couldn't do so till night, I decided to knock off for the afternoon.

It came as no great surprise to me when I entered my apartment to find Goldilocks and the Three Bears awaiting me in my living room (printlocks, for all their vaunted infallibility, pose no problem for pros). Goldilocks was sitting on one of my love seats; opposite him on the other, squeezed tightly together, sat the Three Bears.

"Anybody for a can of beer?" I asked.

The Three Bears' eyes lit up, but Gino shook his head. "We are here on the Kurilman matter, Ms. Rinehardt, as you cannot have failed to grasp. For some foolish reason you have ignored my advice to leave the cookie-crumbling to us. Very well: you now have two choices. You can take your rightful place beside the Venus de Milo, minus both your arms, or you can tell me from where Kurilman obtains his girls, a matter of considerable concern to me as a respectable tax-paying citizen, and a mystery which I am sure a talented private investigator like yourself cannot by this time have failed to resolve."

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I sat down on a nearby ottowoman. "From Mars, maybe?"

"He gets them, as you very well know," Gino said, a disarming smile and a grim grin vying for supremacy on his face and with the latter holding a slight edge, "by luring housewives, factory-line females, pasta-parlor waitresses and other such simpletons into his office by means of a clever come-on ad in the classified section of the *Idealia Update*. There, a magic metamorphosis is put into motion that enables the housewives, factory-line females, pasta-parlor waitresses and other such simpletons to leave by the same door they came in by and yet which somehow allows those of them who are qualified for call-girl work to simultaneously remain and to go out later on in a professional capacity and drive away the cares of Kurilman's clients for the cut-rate sum of $400. What I want to know is how does he accomplish this legerdemain?"

My apartment is on the topmost floor, which means it's equipped with skylights and gets a lion's share of sunshine. It was filled with sunshine now, and already that damned halo was taking form above Gino's periwigged head. Jove, Jupiter. *Capo de tutti capi.* Inheritor of the spoils of the Castellammarese War, of the successive empires of Masseria, Maranzano, Luciano, Genovese, Gambino, Lucci, and Bombasino. God in a codpiece and a wig arrogantly striding over the power-cathected masochists fawning at his feet —

No, Gino, no. Not over me. "Kurilman," I said, "has a machine like a big sausage-grinder. His wife puts the girls in, adds equal parts sugar, spice and everything nice, and he turns the handle. And for every girl put in, two come out, one to do his bidding and one to go back to her 3V set, her factory-line job or waiting on tables."

In a secret compartment of the ottowoman, within easy reach of my right hand, was a fully charged raze pistol. But I had no need of it. Grim grin and disarming smile fought for a while on Gino's face, with neither winning out. Nothing remained. Nothing. He got up without a word and walked out the door. The Three Bears followed, staring sideways at me as they passed. Not with disbelief, but with relief. For if Gino had given the order, they could not have carried it out. It was theirs as well as his Achilles' heel.

After an afternoon of work and relaxation (I did my laundry and reread Camus' *The Plague*), I prepared a light dinner and ate by yellow candlelight at my little dining table with its damask cloth. I hadn't touched Sespol's $700 advance (it's my policy never to spend a client's money till I've fully earn-

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ed it); when I did, I'd buy the steak I'd been ravenous for for weeks and maybe even have french fries and a tossed salad to go with it.

Eleven o'clock found me parked across the street from the main entrance of the Sespol Sky-Rise, my Laseroid camera sharing the seat beside me with my handbag. Idealia is not ideally illuminated; as with ordinary cities, only lights of low wattage are allowed in residences and business places, and streetlights are confined to corners. The pitch goes something like this: "National switchover to solar power is just around the corner, folks, but until we round that corner we've got to go right on conserving." The argument would make sense (1) if "conserving" applied to 3V and (2) if realistic restrictions were imposed on indiscriminate use of energy during daytime hours. As matters stand, it's nothing but a psychological gimmick to ease peoples' minds while Rome burns.

Most of the windows of the Sespol Sky-Rise were dark, but a few glowed wanly in the night, one of them on the fourteenth floor. Whether or not it belonged to Suite 1400, I had no way of knowing.

Electricar traffic was sparse, pedestrian even sparser. As I sat there waiting I killed time by trying to find the Kurilman story's missing paragraph. I knew all right what he was doing and I knew he was doing it somewhere in Suite 1400. It was true that, not being of mechanical bent, I didn't know precisely *how* he was doing it, but he *was* doing it, and, that being so, why hadn't he done it to me? I'd seen him swallow, hadn't I? And where did Cecily Sturmi Kurilman fit in? Surely she must have a bigger piece of the action than her role as sec.-treasr.-receptionist would suggest.

An electricab pulled up in front of the main entrance, and a girl in a gown came out and got in. A hologirl? The corner streetlight was too faraway to shed much light on the scene. I doubt whether I'd have been able to tell anyway.

Just to make sure, I decided to wait for a repeat performance, and let the cab take off without tailing it.

A short while later another cab pulled up, and another girl in a gown came out and got in. This time, when the cab took off, I followed.

I know Idealia like a book, and before the cab had gone three blocks, I knew it was headed for the Tryst Inn. So I got ahead of it and was parked across the street when it pulled up opposite the entrance. The girl in the gown got out, paid the driver with money she took from her shoe (she had no handbag), and ran up a shrub-bordered walk to the door. I got a halfway

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decent look at her in the wan radiance of the entrance light as she let herself in, and something about her — exactly what it was, I couldn't fathom — gave me a bad turn. It was a feeling sort of like *déjà vu*, at least in the sense that it came and went so fast I couldn't pin it down.

By the time I gained the little lobby, she was already on her way up in the elevator. The indicator stopped at 5. The lobby was empty, as one would expect at that time of night. Next to the elevator was a buzzer with which to summon the night clerk. Next to that hung the Tryst Inn directory.

An Idealia ordinance requires that all such directories be updated daily. So I knew when I peered at the names that they weren't those of persons who had checked out umpteen years ago.

Only three rooms on the fifth floor were occupied: 502 by a John Olms, 507 by a Clinton Adams and 510 by a Charles Proveno. It's not hard to spot an alias, and an alias was what I was looking for. Why? Because pseudo-prestigious hostelries like the Tryst Inn are made to order for middle-income out-of-towners who like to shack up with call girls, and middle-income out-of-towners generally cherish their good names.

I settled for "Clinton Adams." It had just the right pseudo-prestigious flavor.

I waited for a while before going up. It's *de rigueur* for call girls to make small talk before jumping into bed with a client, and it was unlikely a Kurilman hologirl would go against the grain. Clients have to be taken into consideration too. Sometimes they're up-tight and need to be put at ease.

How do *I* know? I've been around, that's how.

While I waited, I checked my Laseroid to see whether it was loaded properly. It was. After ten minutes had gone by, I stepped into the elevator, which had dutifully returned to lobby level, and told it to take me up to the fifth floor. A narrow hallway, garishly carpeted. Forty-watt lamps burning at either end. Walls with sleazy roses seeming to grow out of them. Opposite 507, I set my Laseroid on the floor, got a small vial out of my handbag and squeezed a few drops of lock acid into the keyhole (for obvious reasons, hotels have never gone in for printlocks). Then I replaced the vial and armed myself with the Laseroid.

The floor plan of a pseudo-prestigious hotel-room is simplicity itself: bed on one wall, 3V set facing it on the opposite; two chairs, one next to the archway leading to the commode-shower, the other beside the bed; one table. Illumination is supplied by a single overhead light, one switch located over the head-

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board of the bed, the other to the left of the door jamb.

I waited the sixty seconds necessary for the lock acid to do its work, then I turned the knob, stepped inside and switched on the light. My Laseroid was already pointed in the right direction. When the bed appeared on the viewer, I turned the knob, and the brief brightness of the laser beams revealed to my right eye what the holo-film recorded: Kurilman's client banging away like sixty —

Banging *me!*

The little whore didn't dematerialize till quarter after eight the next morning. I stood guard at the door the whole night through to make sure she didn't sneak out and bring even more shame to bear on my good name.

I kicked the sleazy clothes she'd been wearing (I'd made her put them back on) under the bed. "Clinton Adams" had long since absconded. I don't know which demoralized him more — glancing over his shoulder and seeing me or the look in my eyes. Whichever, he'd dressed and departed post-haste.

I was still a little shaky when I slipped behind the wheel of my Blue Jay, and to calm myself I went for a ride in the park. It was well after nine when I took the elevator up to the fourteenth floor of the Sespol Sky-Rise. The first thing I did was swing my handbag against the recessed case that held the antique fireman's ax. When the glass window shattered, I seized the ax and entered the Talent Associates reception room. Goldilocks and the Three Bears were there, and so were Bernie and Sam. Ms. Cecily Sturmi Kurilman sat behind her mahoganoid desk like a becalmed brown battleship, gazing raptly at a point in space just above Goldilocks' head. Her husband was wading back and forth through the pile carpeting, wringing his hands and saying over and over, "What other girls? What other girls?"

All of them gaped when I came in with my ax.

I walked past them, kicked open the inner door, went into the intermediate waiting-room and smashed that damned mirror to smithereens. Behind it stood a Christmas-treelike complex of crystals, tubes, wires and widgets. I smashed that too. Behind where it had been, separated from me by a soundproof paraglass partition, the cream of yesterday's crop of hologirls, wearing hand-me-down pajamas, were lolling on studio couches, eyes focused on the screen of an inculcator. The culls were nowhere to be seen.

No one tried to stop me on my way out. After I replaced the fire-

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man's ax in its recessed case, I went down and got in my Blue Jay and headed for my apartment.

On the way, I stopped off at the Idealia Public Library and did some belated research.

"In laser holography," I told Sespol the next morning, "a laser beam is divided by means of a mirror. One of the two resultant beams is used to illuminate the subject, and the reflection from the subject is cast upon a photographic plate. The other beam is reflected from the mirror directly upon the plate. This is the reference beam. Merging on the plate with the light coming from the subject, it creates an interference pattern. When the reference beam only is directed upon the plate, the rays passing through the plate translate the interference pattern into an exact 3-D duplicate, called a 'virtual image,' of the subject. This was Thomas Wentworth's starting point when he set out to invent his 'holoplicator.'"

For a change, Sespol's gaze wasn't directed at my legs. It was directed straight across my desktop at my face. "And you smashed this — this machine?"

"You know perfectly well I did. You covered up for me, didn't you?"

"Yes. But not for your sake. For the sake of the Sespol Sky-Rise.... But *why* did you smash it? Surely not just to keep Odrussi from getting his hands on it. He couldn't have — not with the IRS on the scene."

"With Cecily Kurilman also on the scene, he just might have. Wentworth's machine," I went on, "employed only the basic principles of laser holography. It went as far beyond them as four-dimensional geometry goes beyond plane geometry. It could create life-size 3-D images in space, and it could create them so forcibly that they acquired separate realities. With inanimate objects, the duration of these realities was so evanescent as to be nil. For reasons we'll never know, only image-realities comprised of living cells retained reality for any appreciable length of time — in the case of humans, for as long sometimes as forty-six hours. But Wentworth's purpose wasn't to holoplicate people — he doesn't *like* people. What he wanted was to accumulate permanent holoplications of *objets d'art*. When the holoplications refused to retain reality for more than a split second, he wrote the machine off as a failure, and when Kurilman offered to buy him out — the machine, having been built on company time, belonged to the company — he jumped at the chance. In her own sweet way Kurilman's wife had seen its possibilities instantly. After the deal went through, she took a crash-course in

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speedteaching. Six months later, Talent Associates was born.

"Why speedteaching?" Sespol asked.

"Obviously, the holoplicator couldn't holoplicate intangibles, such as personality, character, educational background and the like. Probably all that came through was the subject's organic self, plus one or two acquired physical faculties. Cecily Sturmi Kurilman didn't have time, even with an inculcator to help her, to teach her hologirls much, but she didn't need to. How much education does a walking, talking fornicatory doll need? ... Everything clear in your mind now, Mr. Sespol?"

"As a bell." He grinned at me. Evilly.

He knew. He *knew!*

"And now, Ms. Rinehardt," he said, holding out his hand "since I didn't pay you to investigate Kurilman's activities, if you'll fork over the porno-photo I did pay you for, I'll forget about the black eye you almost gave the Sespol Sky-Rise and go my merry way."

I removed the fourteen fifties he'd given me from my handbag and laid them on the desktop. "There is no porno-photo. I forgot to load my Laseroid."

Still grinning, he opened his shoulder purse, counted out fourteen fifties of his own and laid them beside mine. "*I* think there is."

"Pick up your sleazy money and get out!"

He snickered. Then, slowly, he got to his feet, picked up the twenty-eight fifties and stuffed them into his shoulder purse. When he snickered again, I turned my back on him. I heard him walk out the door. Snicker, snicker, snicker, all down the hall —

Nancy Drew, Girl Detective

D.D. Rinehardt, Private Eye.

Sometimes at night I climb the stairs to the apartment-building roof and sit on one of the sunchairs and look up at the stars. At my star. It's Arcturus, in case you care to know. Orange-red, cold, faraway. And yet not my star at all. The Grape has a thousand faces, wine comes in a thousand forms. My body is a garden in spring round which I have built a wall. When I write I imitate Chandler, Hammett and Spillane when all the while I yearn to set down sentences with the sensitivity of poor Scott.

I sit in my sunchair and I cry beneath the stars.

D. D. Rinehardt, Private Eye —

Hard-boiled Nancy Drew.

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DRY SKIN

John Varley's THE PERSISTENCE OF VISION should be a strong contender for a major award, even though the mystical ending does not seem quite right after the practicality of daily detail. At the same time, the very excellence of the work makes the one point which Varley seems not to have thought through stand out. The people shower, of necessity, after dinner. They eat "three superb meals a day," each one apparently comparable to dinner. This implies three showers a day. Their water supply is irrigational. Where are all those people getting the water for three showers a day? And even assuming they have that problem solved through some splendid rapid-recycling system — what are three showers a day doing to their skin in the dry climate of the southwest? When I lived in Colorado, I could not wash my full face even *once* every day, or I would end up with dry, flaky cheeks; my lower legs, thanks to swimming two or three times a week, were perpetually red and scaly. Either these people need an immense supply of skin lotion, or the frequency with which their communication leads to sexual intercourse is readily explainable: they are literally horny.

Randall Garrett's "The Horror Out of Time" is a shimmering polyhedron of a gem. It should be included in every Lovecraftian anthology from now on.

—Phyllis Karr

HEARTILY SICK

I am heartily sick of reading story after story in F&SF where not only is there no female protagonist but no seriously treated female character at all. Every female character is either a piece of ass, a potential piece of ass, a battle axe, a baby factory, a nag, a prize, a dependent nitwit, a piece of property .. the list goes on. Is there not a single writer who submits a story wherein a female character is portrayed as a human being? Your magazine does not merit the title "science fiction" — only "fantasy" — or more accurately "pulp," and offensive pulp at that. You are cheating me and you are cheating you other readers who have expected literary excellence, or at the very least, entertaining diversion, but who have been intellectually insulted by nearly every story. They can't all be Hugo winners but they don't have to be trash, either. Shape up your act.

—Ms. Barbara L. Sie

GAS

David Hardy and you guys have something in common; you don't check the accuracy of your covers.

In the '78 January magazine is picture of a creature making snowman (or should I say a snowalien or even better an ammonialien). In the background is a picture of a gas plane Now, let's see which one it is.

First we are quite sure of what Jupiter looks like. It has an enormous amount of color variations (such as reds, yellows, and pinks). This world a dull green so we can safely assume is not Jupiter.

The next gas giant is Saturn. Saturn has a ring which divides the planet in great circle. In the picture is a plan with more than half its diameter showing but there is no ring.

We'll skip out to Neptune. Neptune has the same drab color but Neptune

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has only two moons (that we know of). Now this picture has three moons, two of which are in the background and the one our alien is standing on.

An argument could go that we have not yet discovered this moon but our "friendly" alien is making some artistic creation out of some kind of frozen matter. This type of matter would have escaped if it were made of a minute amount of matter. Because of this frozen substance, which is white, it would have a sizeable albedo. This would make it easy to observe. I assume this is not Neptune.

The next world is Uranus. It was recently discovered that Uranus has a ring which divides the world into a great circle, but this planet shows more than half its diameter. Now this ring is barely visible from earth but should be easily seen from this moon.

Congratulations! You have drawn a planet that is not even in this solar system. Maybe it's an incident which happened a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away (but that would anger George Lucas for stealing his copyright on *Star Wars*).

—Paul Jones, age 14

The painting was in our inventory for a long time and was drawn before the discovery of Uranus ring. Mr. Hardy offered to draw it in, but we thought no one would notice. Serves us right.

RELIEF

Having read science fiction for some 25 years and never being moved to write a fan letter, I find myself unable to resist telling you about the February issue, volume 54, no. 2.

It is simply the finest issue of a science fiction magazine I have seen. Generally, in one of every five or so issues of the various magazines I pick up (F&SF far more regularly than others, incidentally), I find a story which seems to me outstanding. Almost never are there two tales in a given issue which are more than workmanlike.

Of the seven stories in your February issue, I for one would award each and every one four stars. My sense of wonder runneth over. Keep it up, that it won't be another 25 years before you can pry a fan letter out of me...

—Charles F. Durang

FELLINI, BERGMAN & SPACE: 1999

This letter is a cry for justice against Baird Searles' tunnel-visioned opinions on SF in the visual media.

More specifically, I would like to know how we are expected to take seriously the opinions of someone who invariably puts down *Space: 1999*, while promoting shows like *Wonder Woman*, which has no more to offer viewers than a size 38 bust carried by its star.

As this letterhead shows, more people than Baird Searles would care to believe take *Space: 1999* seriously. There are a thousand-plus members in this organization alone. Many of them are college students or graduates who also go for "2001," "THX 1138," and Bergman and Fellini films. While we would be the first to admit the show's second season left much to be desired (it was produced by the same idiot who did *Star Trek's* final year), the original version was far beyond anything *Trek* has ever done.

Perhaps Searles' dislike stems from a lack of understanding. Many of us, on first seeing some of the episodes in the

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first season, were of the opinion that they were very muddled and wooden. Second and third viewings have, however, revealed subtle, low-keyed acting and highly complex plots. Like "2001," sometimes with *1999* the stories are so complicated that all the pieces don't fall into place until the second time around.

Searles and his lettercol sympathizers also are grossly unfair to other shows, namely *Logan's Run* and the Irwin Allen brand of escapist science fiction. The former show improved vastly since Searles' scathing review of it. And one cannot criticize the latter shows and in the same breath praise "Star Wars." The two are so identical!

—Ted Michael Hruschak

Baird Searles replies

I really could never understand why readers writing letters of disagreement feel they must be disagreeable as well. For my part, I have nothing but respect and a bit of awe for anyone who can find subtlety and complexity in *Space 1999, Logan's Run* et al. I might add that anyone who knows me would know that I am hardly one to be influenced by Wonder Woman's 38" bust; the endearing quality of her show is that it doesn't take itself seriously, a rare quality these days. But there may be light at the end of the tunnel vision; I *do* like *Quark*. In any case, best of luck to The National SAVE: 1999 Alliance, for whom Mr. Hruschak seems to be speaking.

CORRECTION

It is nice to be back in print again ("The Green Dog," May 1978). However, there is one problem. I don't know what can be done about it, but I want to tell you what it is.

On page 99 in the May issue, about 2/3 of the way down the first column it says:

> Probably some *gay* who wanted to convert him.

Usually a typo is regrettable but doesn't really change the story much. But in this instance the change from goy to gay adds a kink to the story that I'd rather weren't there.

Is it possible to run an erratum note in the earliest possible issue?

—Mel Gilden

FROM THE 2205 AD MOTHER GOOSE

Mary's ship is FTL,
She flies it fast and brisk.
Mary is a little fool
Her little*.

—Gerald Abrams

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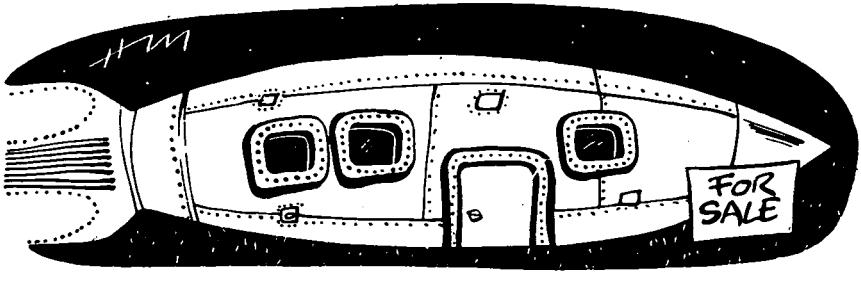

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